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MUHAMMAD ALI

1942-2016

IN HIS OWN WORDS

1963 RING COLUMN BY CASSIUS CLAY WAS PROPHETIC

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SEPTEMBER 2016

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WHY HE TRULY WAS 'THE GREATEST'

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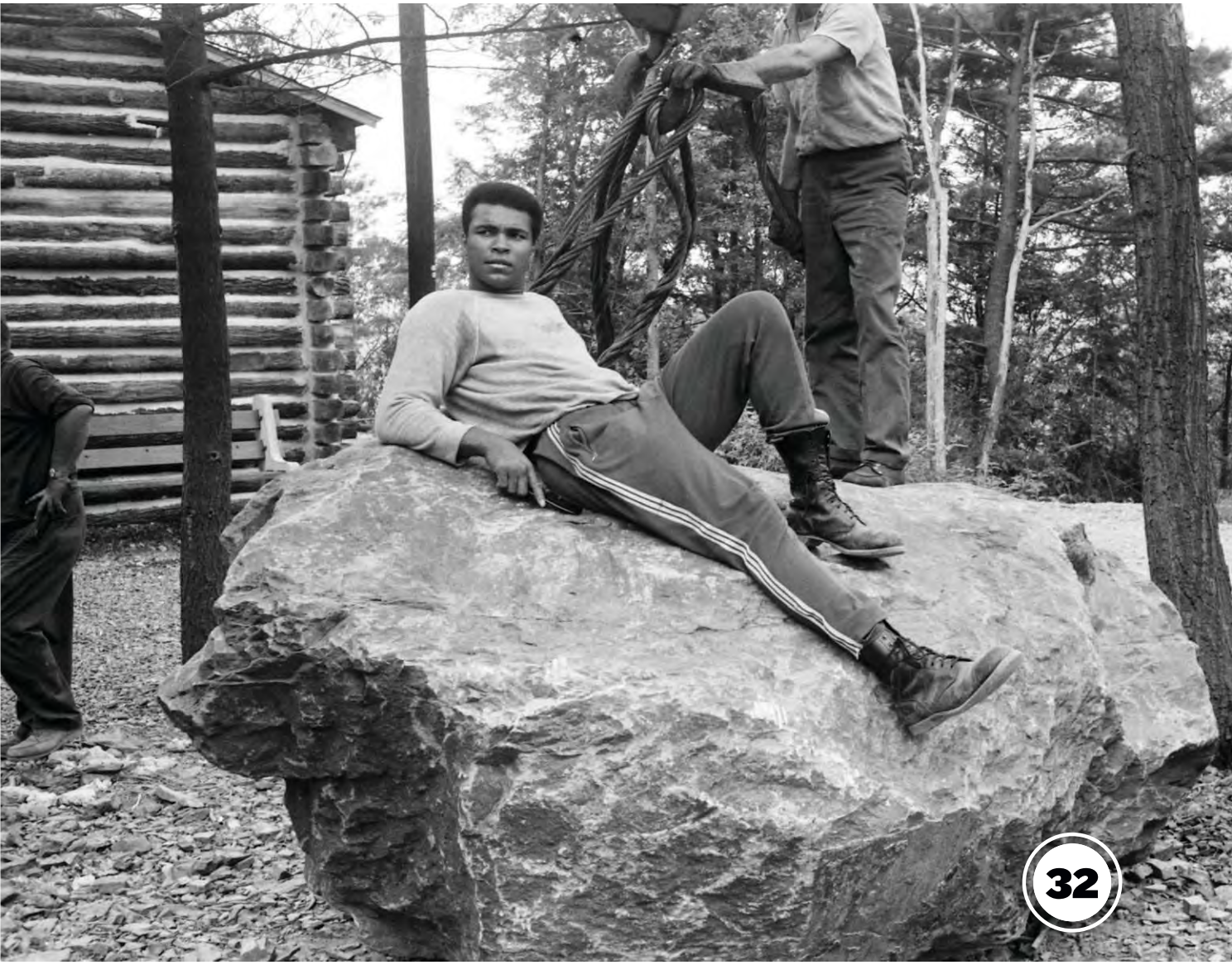

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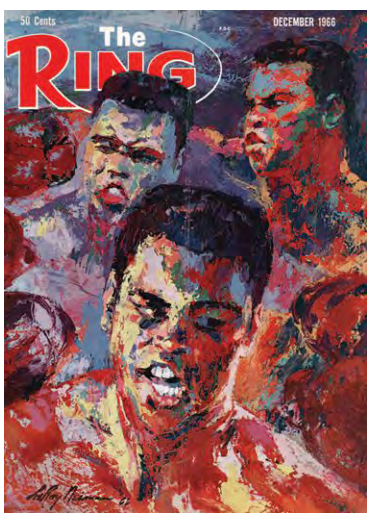

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The world was saddened by the death of Muhammad Ali (pictured above at training camp) on June 3.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY STANLEY WESTON/THE RING MAGAZINE/GETTY IMAGES.

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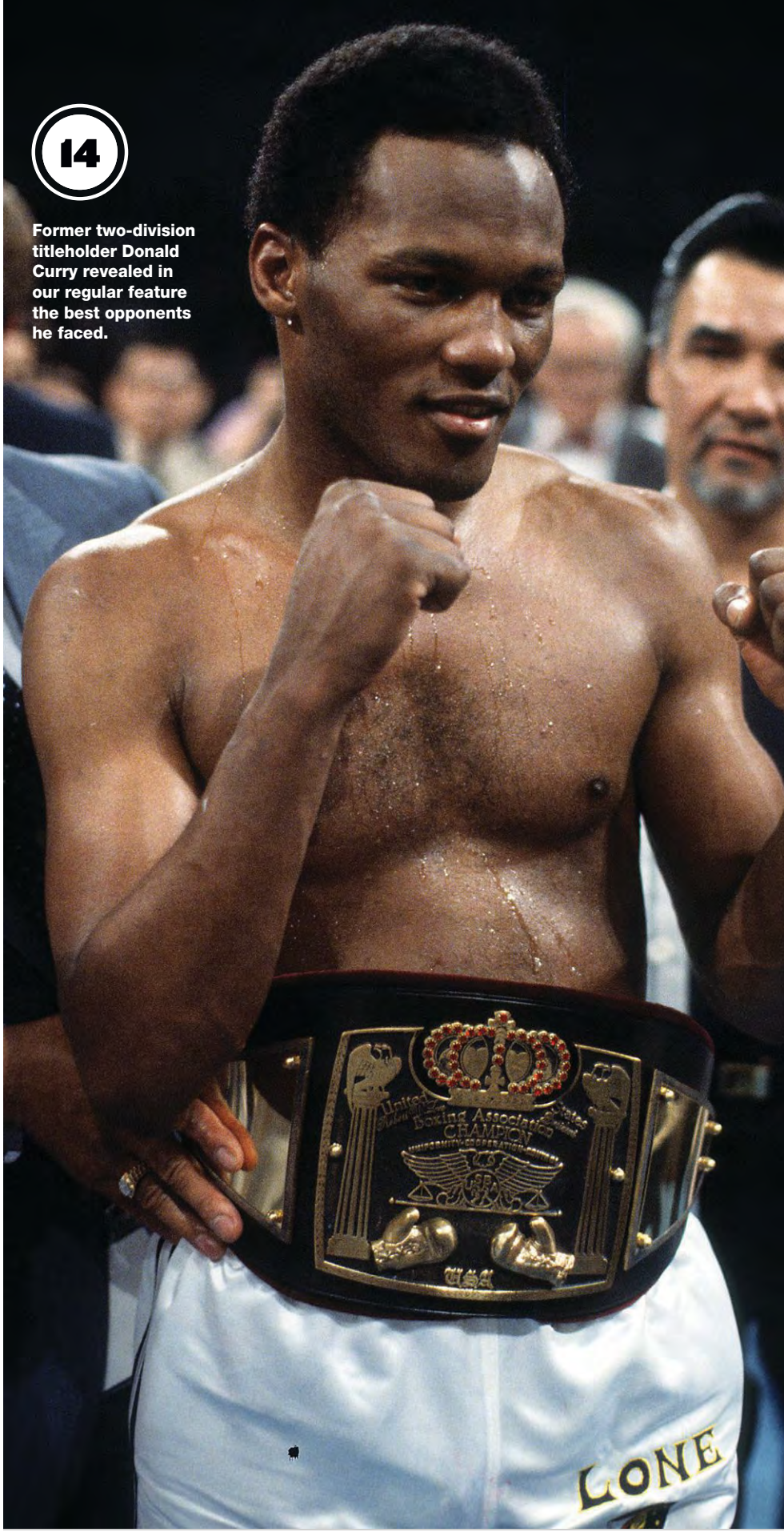

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TIME TO CALL IT QUITS?
Amir Khan should consider retirement
GO TO: http://bit.do/khan-retirement

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ALI: IMPERFECTLY PERFECT

I have lived most of my adult life with mixed feelings about Muhammad Ali.

I will always admire Ali the boxer. The Greatest was truly a special fighter, a fact that can get lost amid his other compelling qualities. The first incarnation of Ali – before his hiatus from boxing – had weapons no heavyweight has had before or since. And while he lost a step in his second incarnation, he compensated with guile and underappreciated toughness, as he demonstrated against George Foreman.

Both versions were great.

I will smile whenever I think of Ali's shtick – the mostly playful trash talk, the poems predicting the rounds in which he'd score knockouts, the amusing repartee with Howard Cosell and so on. Ali was brilliant fun.

The mixed feelings come in when discussing some of things he said and the primary stand he took.

I don't believe Ali meant to cause Joe Frazier pain when he referred to his rival as a gorilla or even an "Uncle Tom," the latter a term that pitted Frazier's own people against him. The damage was done, though. Ali should've known better.

Worse, Ali actually said in 1974, "The white man is the Devil. We do believe that. We know it!" He was merely regurgitating what he learned from Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, but his words were vile.

The stand for which he is best known is his refusal to enter the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War. Some considered him a "draft dodger," others a booming voice for common sense. I always saw both sides.

I'm unequivocal on this, though: I believe wholeheartedly that Ali deserves the outpouring of the love he has received since he died on June 3. This is why:

Individuals or organizations driven by hatred deserve our scorn. That includes the Nation of Islam, with which Ali was associated as a young man. The fact is he distanced himself from such sentiments long ago, though. In the end, he genuinely loved people – all people – and wanted the best for them. His diverse funeral reflected that.

No one whose primary motivation is self-advancement or self-promotion is worthy of admiration. That wasn't Ali, at least not when it came to his convictions. I believe he was motivated by his morality – not self-gain – when he refused induction.

Ali risked everything in his stand against the U.S. government, his boxing career and prison time.

He probably could've lived in exile abroad to avoid the draft, as others had. Instead, he chose to stay and fight.

And, finally, there was his inspiration. Ali refused induction for a poignant reason: He was being asked to fight overseas for a country that, at that time, still didn't afford him basic rights at home. If you don't at least understand that concept, then you are too closed-minded to be in the discussion.

Again, Ali wasn't perfect. He acknowledged that publicly, which is another reason to embrace him. He was admired by millions worldwide because he was a great fighter – in the ring and for much bigger causes.

Francisco Vargas (right) and Orlando Salido took turns rearranging each other's faces in a brutal draw on June 4.

MUHAMMAD ALI EDITION

Combine Jordan, Montana, Aikman, Agassi, Jeter, Maradona, Beckham and Pele and you might – just might – get an athlete who could measure up to Ali. But even then the "Louisville Lip" would still outtalk and outhustle that eight-headed monster. The man defied hyperbole: His will was iron, his physical gifts were extraordinary, his work ethic was superhuman and his global impact was transcendent. He might have even defied gravity for all we know. Ultimately, it's not a stretch to say that he was the greatest sportsman who ever lived.

Chris Wallace
Buenos Aires, Argentina

A shining beacon of this time.
A social activist, humanitarian, philanthropist. Oh, and a great boxer too.

Andrew Robinson
Newport, South Wales, U.K.

Such a brave brave man in and out of the ring. He conquered Liston (twice), Frazier (two out of three) and Foreman. And we never even saw him fight in his prime; in those years, he was barred from boxing and had his passport taken away for his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War (a stance he took out of principle alone; if he did allow himself to be drafted, he would have had a cakewalk of PR appearances and exhibition matches). In short, he was a true People's Champ – one who stood up for the underdog, the working man.

David Van Deusen
Montpelier, Vermont

Ali had so many special qualities but one that may go overlooked during this sad time is that he was tremendously funny. There was always a twinkle in his eye, an ironic little smile on his face as he ran that famous "Louisville Lip." Ali was the ultimate warrior but he's also a testament to the power of humor and how it can be used to transcend struggle and adversity even in the most trying times.

Jack Esler
Vancouver

He was an a--hole for what he did to Joe Frazier. When Ali was banned from boxing Frazier gave him money to help him and in return Ali called him a gorilla and other things. So enough said about him as a person.

Warren Stevens
La Loche, Saskatchewan, Canada

As a child I watched with great amusement as Ali performed his "poetry" and antics on TV. Later, as a teen, I started a love affair with boxing, now over 40 years, because of Ali's stance against the Vietnam War and the first bout against Frazier. I realize that his brutal remarks toward Frazier hurt Joe more than any punches and that Ali spewed racial views that any KKK member would be proud of. Still, Ali, frail and trembling, grew as a man and is loved by millions. And part of my youth died with him.

Vincent Fisher
Ranson, West Virginia

Thought he'd live forever.
Pull off upset number three.
Liston, Foreman, Death.
Float like butterfly, sting like a bee.

Cedric Smith
Atlanta

My dad took me to see the Rumble in the Jungle on closed circuit, truthfully, because Mom made him. But because Ali was his champion, and boxing was one of the few things he and I talked about easily, Ali became my champion. Through Ali's later career, my dad was able to discuss difficult subjects with me, like courage, responsibility, race, politics and what it means to make your way in the world. Through Ali, I got to know my dad. I can't tell you what Ali means to the world. I can only tell you what he means to Dad and me.

Jason S. Morad
Wellesley, Mass.

Muhammad Ali will be remembered as a trailblazer on many fronts. His expressions of peace and opinions on race and politics in America bring about the question: How much progress has America really made? Sure, we have had significant milestones, but the sentiment expressed by Ali in the 1960s continues to this day. Latinos like myself, my African-American and white friends all share politically polarized views on race and ethnicity, including equality in America. Current fighters have been vocal about their feelings toward gays, race, networks, rankings and organizations, including promotional companies. Is it the business agenda of those running boxing to avoid these topics? Why isn't THE RING Magazine using its platform to voice the mood and sentiment of the boxing community? Ali raised awareness on civil rights. He was vilified then but now his courage is praised. As a gay, die-hard boxing fan, it's hard to ignore: slurs fighters and fans use, the expressed feelings of mistreatment based on race, and the overall feeling that boxing and its entities grant privilege and oppress subjectively rather than by merit.

NAOKI FUKUDA

Where is the voice of Ali? Who is stepping up to address the existing ills in our boxing community?

Tim Gallegos
San Francisco

Ali – draft dodger!

Steve Vargo, Vietnam veteran
Columbus, Ohio, Amvets Post 1928

All great men are great enigmas. Muhammad Ali, nicknamed "The Greatest," was certainly worthy of much kudos. Is it impertinent to mention the parts of the man that, perhaps, were overlooked? Ali was one of the few men in history that was a legend and a myth before his death. Is it, perhaps, a cliche to solely pronounce all the great things that the man accomplished? Surely myths are close cousins to fairytales … full of magic, mystique and fantasy. What fascinates me is not so much Ali and his achievements, his skills and charisma, but how we, the admirers and bestowers of myth, treat such legends. Are we allowed to mention his contradictions? The women? His treatment of Joe Frazier? His cloudy relationship with the black militant group, the Nation of Islam? Muhammad Ali was an exceptional human being. He walked and talked among us. Let us not smudge his time on this earth with anything that is less than dignified, true, respectful and real.

Kiowa Craig
Sydney, Australia

I was born in 1966. My father boxed in the Marine Corps and he followed the sport intensely. Needless to say, he wasn't an Ali fan. My father was a virulent racist; violent, unpredictable and explosive, and his main joy in life was terrorizing everyone around him, including and perhaps especially his wife and children. I suppose one of his goals was to make sure that I thought he was the toughest guy on the planet and that I should be like him but I had a completely different role model. I saw Ali, the heavyweight champ, the toughest man on earth, on TV nearly every day and I never saw him trying to frighten, humiliate or bully people. It seemed as if in every interview he was trying to give encouragement and love to anyone

who felt powerless. And when you were a kid listening to him, you felt like he was speaking directly to you. I ran around singing "Muhammad, the Black Superman" (yes, this was a thing when I was a kid), floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee to the best of my abilities in slap fights with my friends. He was in the comic books I read. He was in commercials telling me to brush my teeth. He was on "Candid Camera" joking with kids and Alan Funt. He was EVERYWHERE, the most famous man on the planet, more famous than Elvis Presley. I'm not sure if you can completely understand if you weren't there and you weren't that age but he really meant something to us. He still does. There's a reason you hear about grown men breaking into tears when they meet him, before he even shakes their hand or says a word to them. I still can't quite wrap my head around the fact that he's gone but I think his body surely must have felt like a cage to him in his last years. And if there has ever been a man who can say that he accomplished his mission on this planet, it's Ali. RIP, Champ. I can honestly say that if Ali hadn't been on the scene when I was a kid, I might well have grown up a different, and worse, man.

Bernie Dunning
Las Vegas

What can anyone say about Muhammad that hasn't already been said? The world's literary geniuses – Mailer, Schulberg, A.J. Liebling – have all tried before. Boxing aficionados like Hugh McIlvanney, revered in the U.K. and elected to the IBHOF, have captured and shared Muhammad's life through their prose. Ali's journey has been etched in our own lives and consciousness for five decades. We have been thrilled, roared with laughter, watched in amazement and, at times, wept at his journey. His life has been a constant presence and shaped my own in many ways. From my father's tales of wonder of Miami and Liston, 1964, through the '70s and '80s to the London Olympics, I and my countrymen have loved this man and I have tried to match his humility and humanism. I am one of the chosen few who can say I met the man. Las Vegas Hilton, May 29, 1987, on the eve of Tyson-Thomas, a day I will cherish forever. In that fleeting moment his wonder shone through. Rest in peace, Muhammad. Our lives are richer for sharing your wonder.

Robert Harding
Kent, England

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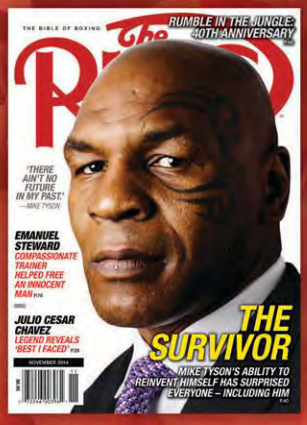

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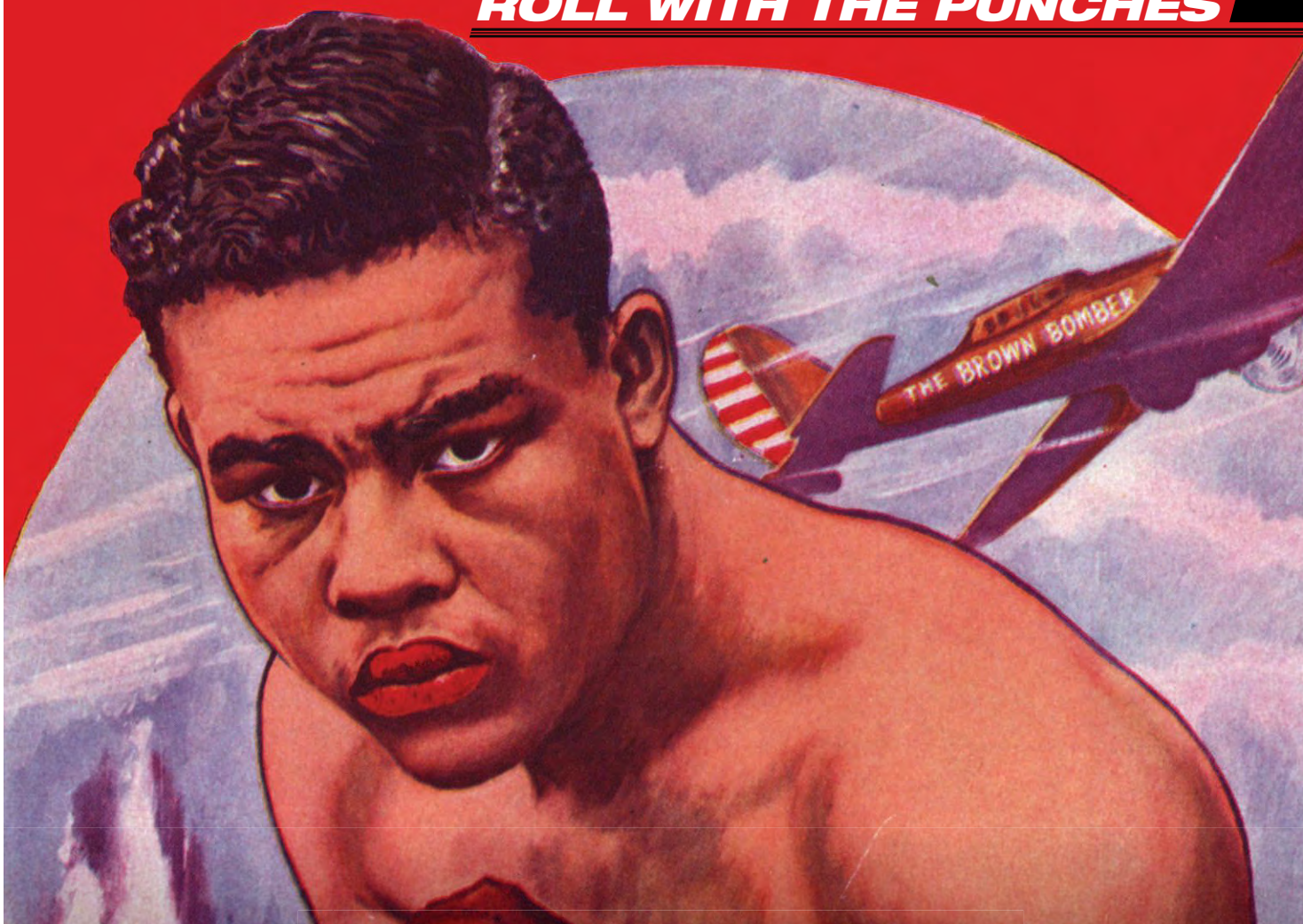


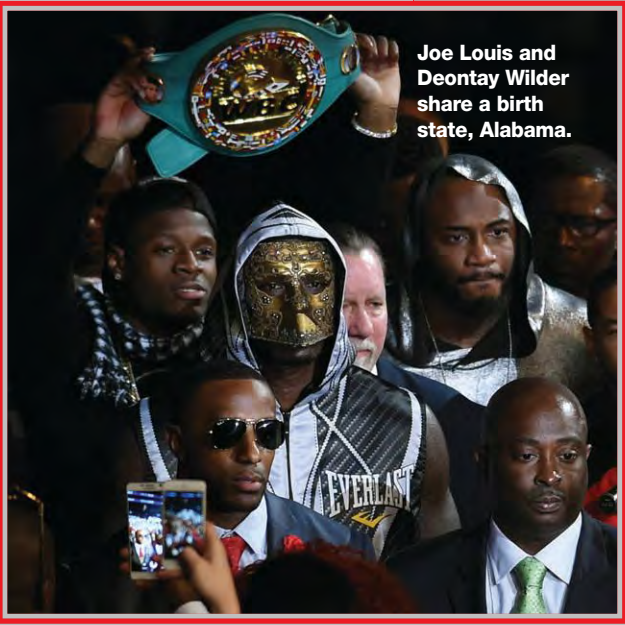
NAOKI FUKUDA

ADVANCED DEGREES

Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. This month, we linked "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis to "Bronze Bomber" Deontay Wilder – the WBC heavyweight titleholder – in seven steps. Here's a look.

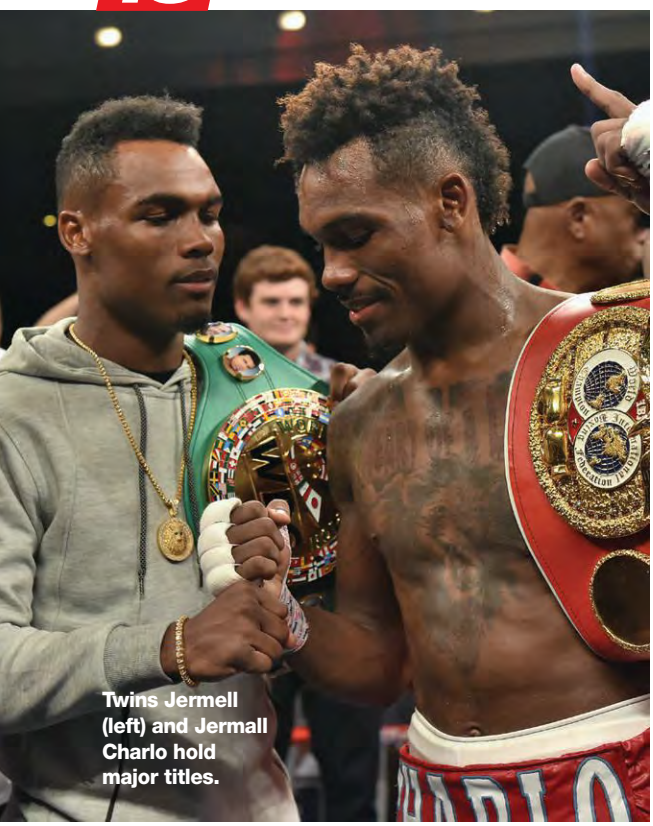
Joe Louis fought
Rocky Marciano, who fought
Archie Moore, who fought
Muhammad Ali, who fought
George Foreman, who fought
Shannon Briggs, who fought
Sergei Liakhovich, who fought
Deontay Wilder »

Thanks to reader Brian Naasz for this contribution.



Joe Louis and Deontay Wilder share a birth state, Alabama.

10 A MONTHLY BOXING LIST


Twins Jermell (left) and Jermall Charlo hold major titles.

This month: The Charlo brothers – Jermall and Jermell – have become the first twins to hold world titles in the same division simultaneously. Here are 10 other sets of twins (or triplets) who have fought professionally (in alphabetical order).

ARISAWA: KOJI AND KAZU (1990s-2000s)

EUBANK: PETER AND SIMON (1980s-'90s)

GALAXY: KHAOSAI AND KAOKOR (1980s-'90s)

MOLINA: JAVIER AND OSCAR (current)

PORPAOIN: CHANA AND SONGKRAM (1980s-2000s)

SULLIVAN: JACK AND MIKE (1900s-'20s)

URANGO: JUAN AND PEDRO (2000s-'10s)

VELASQUEZ: CARLOS IVAN AND JUAN CARLOS (current)

WEAVER: FLOYD, LLOYD AND TROY (1980s-2010s; triplets)

WEBBER: DORA AND CORA (1970s-'90s; sisters)

FIGHTERS' FAVORITES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ WHAT BOXERS ARE INTO OUTSIDE THE SPORT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. FRANCISCO VARGAS WBC JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER / **2. HUGO RUIZ** WBC JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER / **3. REY VARGAS** JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT CONTENDER

FIGHTER	MUSIC	CAR	FOOD	TATTOOS	ATHLETE OUTSIDE BOXING	MOVIE	VIDEO GAME
1.	"I like Spanish rock or alternative music."	"I drive a Fiat 500. (My dream car) would be something like a sports car."	"Chili relleno – chilies stuffed with meat or cheese."	"On my shoulder I have the Olympic rings because I was an Olympian."	"I really like to watch running during the Olympics. I'm a big fan of **Usain Bolt**."	"'Scarface.'"	"I like soccer games."
2.	"Mexican singer **Vicente Fernandez**."	"I drive a Honda Civic and my dream car is a **Lamborghini**."	"**Seafood.**"	"No tattoos."	"Lionel Messi."	"'The Pursuit of Happyness' with Will Smith."	"'**FIFA 2016**'"
3.	"Salsa and electronic."	"I love high velocity anything but I love motorcycles in Mexico. I drive a motorcycle."	"Mexican, spicy food, green enchiladas."	"I don't have tattoos."	"Actually I don't like or see any other sports other than boxing and my favorite is Julio Cesar Chavez."	"'Fast and Furious.' I love those cars."	"Sorry, I don't play video games. They are a waste of time."

— **Anson Wainwright**

THE BEST AND WORST IN BOXING FROM THE PAST MONTH By Michael Rosenthal

GOOD

I made a $1 bet with a junior high school classmate that Muhammad Ali would beat Joe Frazier in their first fight, the Fight of the Century. To me, it was a sure thing. Ali was godlike and no one beats a god. Then, when it happened, I was crushed and confused, as well as a dollar poorer. I never lost faith in my hero, though. I never believed Ali would lose any of his subsequent fights. And he rarely disappointed me. When he avenged the loss to Frazier, the world was right again. I was convinced that Ali had simply faced Smokin' Joe too soon in his comeback. When he lost to Ken Norton two years later, I told myself it was because he had broken his jaw. I was vindicated when he won the rematch. Then, when he faced the menacing and favored George Foreman in Zaire, I refused to believe my man wouldn't find a way to make history. He did. That unforgettable fight and Ray Leonard's victory over Roberto Duran in the "No Mas" fight sealed my love for the sport. I knew Ali would beat Leon Spinks in their rematch. I even believed that a 38-year-old Ali would upset a prime Larry Holmes in Ali's penultimate fight. I looked at his body, which he had whipped into shape, and thought, "I know he has one more in him." This time, he didn't. I was saddened but not devastated. I'm not greedy. Ali had given a young boxing fan – one who idolized him – more joy over a decade-plus than anyone could've expected. For that, I'm grateful.

BAD

I'll never forget one phone conversation I had with the late Angelo Dundee, Ali's career-long trainer. We were discussing the fact that Ali missed 3½ years of his prime – from the ages of 25 to 28 – after he was banned from the sport for refusing induction into the U.S. Armed Forces. Dundee paused when the subject came up and said with pain his voice: "Those would've been his best years. It's such a shame." Indeed. As it was, Ali is arguably the greatest heavyweight who ever lived regardless of which incarnation – before and after the ban – we're discussing. The fact is, or certainly seems, we never saw The Greatest at his greatest. I imagine we would've seen during that period a perfect blend of what made Ali great, the speed and athleticism of his youth and the experience and toughness of his later years. That version of Ali very likely would've been untouchable, perhaps in the conversation with Sugar Ray Robinson as the greatest fighter ever pound for pound. Alas, we're left only to our imaginations. Ali was ultimately vindicated by the U.S. Supreme Court, which allowed him to return to boxing. That only makes his exile all the more frustrating: It wasn't necessary. I will always feel a twinge of sadness when I think about that gap in Ali's career, as Dundee did the last 40 years of life. I'm sure many of you feel the same way.

WORSE

Those of us who witnessed Ali at his loquacious best found his inability to speak in the latter part of his life both ironic and heartbreaking. Ali became a beloved international icon largely because of his words, which were alternately profound and hilarious. The fact he lost them because of Parkinson's disease, at least publicly, was a cruel twist of fate. We can only imagine what gems he would've come up with during those unfortunate years. Imagine him on Leno or Letterman the past decade or two; that would've been fun. Of course, the younger Ali gave us more words than all other fighters combined. The world should be grateful for that. Then there is the overall impact the disease had on him. He made occasional public appearances – most famously to light the 1996 Olympic cauldron – but his physical deterioration was painfully obvious. I can't imagine how difficult his life was as his disease progressed, robbing him not only of his words but the ability to live independently at a relatively young age. This was Muhammad Ali, The Greatest, losing the fight of his life. Again, heartbreaking. Of course, Ali was Ali. He handled it as gracefully as anyone could, evidently accepting his fate and still finding great joy in life, particularly from his loving family. That's just another on a long list of reasons to admire a very special man.

RING POLL

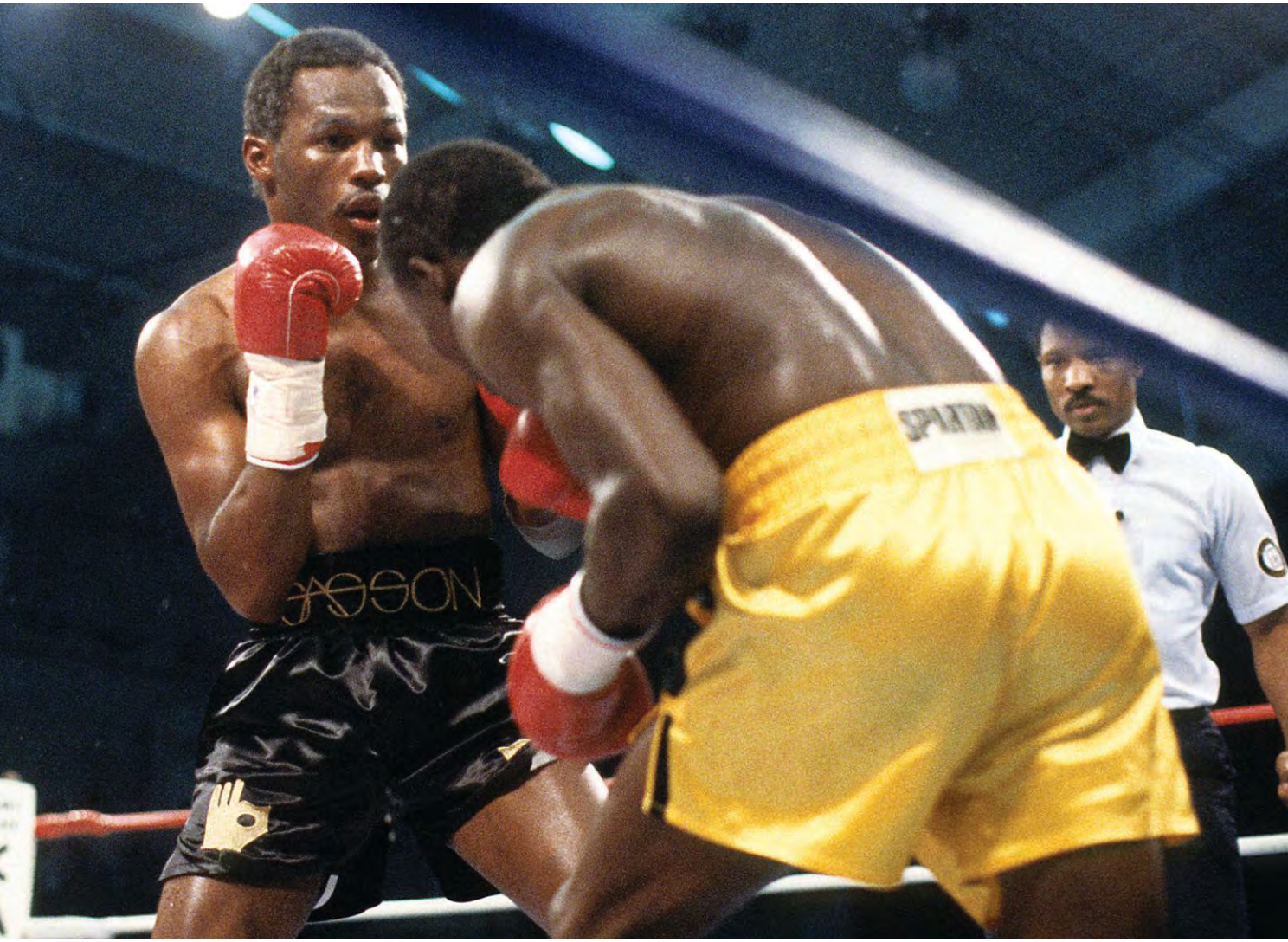
A MONTHLY POLL OF OUR RINGTV.COM READERS

The Greatest died on June 3, 2016. In his honor, we asked: **What was Muhammad Ali's most important victory?** Here is how you responded.

THE PERCENTAGES

56.88	GEORGE FOREMAN	**1.48**	SONNY LISTON II
17.93	SONNY LISTON I	**0.80**	LEON SPINKS II
14.82	JOE FRAZIER III	**0.33**	KEN NORTON III
5.90	JOE FRAZIER II	**0.22**	KEN NORTON II
1.64	OTHER		

NOTE: 4,522 READERS VOTED



DONALD CURRY

34-6 (25 KOs)

Donald Curry (left) learned the hard way that Mike McCallum had significant punching power.

In the mid-1980s Donald Curry was widely considered to be the best fighter pound-for-pound in the world. And then, very suddenly, he wasn't. That was Curry's career in a nutshell.

The Texan, blessed with lightning speed and fight-ending power, was a reported 400-6 in a stellar amateur career and qualified for the 1980 Olympics, only to see the U.S. boycott those Games.

"I was heartbroken," Curry told THE RING recently, "but it gave me more desire to really go after the world championship (as a professional)."

Curry made his pro debut in December 1980. Only 22 months later, he made a big statement by outpointing then-unbeaten Marlon Starling to establish himself as a force in the welterweight division.

He won the vacant WBA title by easily outpointing Jun-Suk Hwang in his next fight, which Curry called his proudest moment in boxing.

"It was a dream come true," he said. "I promised myself if I work my butt off I'm going to be champion and it happened."

Curry had embarked on a terrific run, as he would win his next nine fights (eight by knockout). Among his victims: Starling in a rematch, Nino La Rocca and Milton McCrory.

He considers the victory over McCrory, a spectacular second-round knockout to unify three titles in 1985, his best.

"It had to be McCrory because that made me," Curry said. "He had a championship, just as much talent as I do. I had the other championships, so, hey, let's get it on. We were friends; we grew up in boxing together (but) never fought each other. We both had great accomplishments. It was something personal because we were friends."

Curry, named Co-Fighter of the Year with Marvin Hagler by THE RING for 1985, seemed all but unbeatable. And then disaster struck.

Lloyd Honeyghan stopped Curry in September 1986 in the sixth round, taking his titles and aura of invincibility. Curry was never the same. Including that fight, he was only 9-6 in the last 15 bouts of his career.

Almost 30 years later, the Honeyghan loss still bothers Curry.

"It wasn't (that) he was the better fighter," he said. "Everybody knew that night (that it wasn't the real Donald Curry in there). Marlon Starling … questioned it. I beat Marlon twice and Marlon handled this guy.

"I can't say Lloyd Honeyghan (in any of the 10 Best I Faced categories) because I wasn't 100 percent; I was sick. I knew I went in sick. I can't even give him credit for anything because of my condition."

Curry was stopped by Michael Nunn and Terry Norris in 1990 and 1991, respectively, his final fights before an ill-fated two-fight comeback in 1997. He retired for good after that.

He is happy with what he achieved.

"Totally satisfied with what I did," he said. "I got into the game to win the championship. I did (that) and I'm satisfied. In my era, I ruled. It was (only) a couple of years but I did do it."

Today Curry, 54, lives in his hometown of Fort Worth and owns real estate as a business. He is divorced and has three children. He doesn't currently work with any noteworthy fighters but has aspirations of staying in the sport as a trainer.

Curry kindly spoke to THE RING about the best he faced in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

Milton McCrory: I had the best jab! Besides myself I would have to say Milton McCrory … his thing was to set you up with his jab. They came at different speeds; it was to set you up for the right hand. He'd get you looking at the jab and boom, there goes the right hand. That was (trainer) Emanuel Steward's theory.

BEST CHIN

Lupe Aquino: Lupe Aquino was a pretty durable fighter.

BEST PUNCHER

Mike McCallum: I can't say McCallum even though he knocked me out with the one punch. During the fight … I never thought that was coming. So I would have to say … Mike McCallum. (Laughs.) It had to be.

FASTEST HANDS

Nino La Rocca: Nobody (stands) out to me. … I'm trying to think who caused me problems, where I had to go back and regroup, and I don't see it. I'm gonna say, since he had a decent jab, Nino La Rocca.

FASTEST FEET

La Rocca: That one is a hard one because I had what I needed to be able to conquer when it came to foot speed. … I didn't fight a whole lot of guys like, say, Floyd Mayweather, a boxer. I think the only guy that was close to that was McCrory and Colin Jones. In order to judge foot speed there are other dynamics that show that is what it is so I'm going to have to say Nino La Rocca.

SMARTEST

Pablo Baez: Nobody had more finesse. I pride myself on finesse. Probably … Pablo Baez. He was a fundamental, technical guy. Then you're going to throw things right and I've got to be pinpoint, and that is what happened.

STRONGEST

La Rocca: Nobody was overwhelming and dominant. I settled down and was a physical fighter myself. I would say La Rocca, he was a physically strong fighter. Colin Jones was a guy who was physically strong.

BEST DEFENSE

Marlon Starling: Him and I talk even today and I do a lot of bragging that he was the best defensive fighter I fought. Matter of fact, his defense was so good it helped me improve mine while I was fighting. I learned something out of that fight. I guess maybe it was timing. He was the one who gave me a little bit of a problem.

BEST SKILLS

McCrory: I would have to say Milton McCrory. He had the Kronk tradition. Most of the fighters that came out of the Emanuel Steward stable had that Tommy Hearns replica style. Tommy was a good boxer and good puncher and most of them guys tried to emulate him.

BEST OVERALL

McCrory: I would have to say Milton McCrory. The accomplishments he made … he was the WBC champ and I was the WBA and IBF and we were shooting for all the marbles – winner take all. It had to be Milton.

Anson Wainwright can be reached at elraincoat@live.co.uk. Follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

Canelo Alvarez made it clear after he stopped Amir Khan that he doesn't fear Gennady Golovkin.

NAOKI FUKUDA

EMPTY TALK?

WE HOPE THAT **CANELO ALVAREZ** AND **GENNADY GOLOVKIN** ACTUALLY MEET IN THE RING

Canelo Alvarez had bold words and he wanted the most dangerous middleweight around to hear them. He invited Gennady Golovkin to step into the ring with him moments after he knocked out Amir Khan on May 7.

"We don't f--- around," he said. "I don't fear anyone."

Those were bold words but they hadn't been followed by bold actions as this issue of the magazine went to press.

Canelo went from calling Golovkin out immediately after the Khan victory to putting Triple-G and boxing fans on hold. He made them wait to see whether he merely wanted to make headlines or actually wants to make the fight happen. Canelo wasn't quite backing away from the idea of facing Golovkin but, at least at the time we went to press, he hadn't done enough to back up what he said on that May night.

Eleven days after the Khan fight, Canelo gave up his WBC world title, casting away the sanctioning body's mandate that he defend it against Golovkin.

"I will fight GGG and I will beat GGG but I will not be forced into the ring by artificial deadlines," Alvarez, or more likely a member of his team, said in a statement released to the media. The WBC had given the fighters and their promoters 15 days to come to an agreement or else the bout would be put up for a

purse bid.

"I am hopeful that by putting aside this ticking clock, the two teams can now negotiate this fight and GGG and I can get in the ring as soon as possible and give the fans the fight they want to see," Alvarez said in his statement.

Golovkin has often described boxing as "not a game," proclaiming it to be "serious business." He meant that the sport of boxing is serious. He's learning just how serious the business side of it is as well.

This wasn't necessarily a move by Canelo to help them make the fight. It could very well have been a move for him to help himself. Canelo maneuvered into a position that allowed him to make Golovkin wait as long as he deemed necessary, to make Golovkin agree to terms that might not have been accepted before.

Since late 2014, Golovkin has been in the extremely rare position of being ranked by one sanctioning body (the WBC) while also having a world title bestowed by another (the WBA at first and now the IBF as well). He beat Marco Antonio Rubio to become the WBC's interim titleholder and, hence, mandatory challenger to a belt held at the time by Miguel Cotto. The thinking was that if none of the major middleweights were willing to face him – and they hadn't been – then Golovkin could in essence force Cotto into the ring or take his belt if he refused.

Cotto persuaded the WBC to let him take another fight first. He initially targeted Canelo but he ended up stopping Daniel Geale. Then the WBC allowed Cotto and Canelo to fight last November. Cotto also had to pay Golovkin a hefty step-aside fee for the privilege but then ditched his title shortly before the Canelo fight rather than pay the WBC's sanctioning fee. Canelo won and inherited Cotto's obligations.

He evidently also inherited Cotto's preference of pushing the fight off for as long as possible.

Canelo and Golovkin's first deadline was actually last December. They agreed that each would have one more bout and they would meet afterward, presumably by the end of 2016, which would allow them time to build demand for the pay-per-view event. Golovkin fought and beat his mandatory challenger, Dominic Wade, in April. Canelo took on and took out Khan in May.

Golovkin now has Canelo's former title. He has reiterated many times that he still wants the fight, as well as the money and attention that come with it. Canelo is still the lineal champion. He beat Cotto, who beat Sergio Martinez, who beat Kelly Pavlik, who beat Jermain Taylor, who beat Bernard Hopkins. Golovkin has already been seen as "the man" at middleweight. This would serve to make it official.

Again, Canelo has said he too wants the Golovkin fight – but on his terms, whatever those might be.

If the fight had gone to purse bid, then Golovkin would've been entitled to 45 percent of the money. Canelo's 55 percent would've come out to much less than the superstar would typically get.

If the fight had gone to purse bid, there would've been no catchweight. Canelo and Cotto's title defenses have all been below the usual middleweight limit. Golovkin says he won't go down any further than 160 pounds and put himself at a disadvantage.

Canelo said after the Khan fight that he would have no problem facing Golovkin at 160 but added he would discuss it with his team. He also said a year ago, after knocking out James Kirkland in a bout with a 155-pound limit, that he'd only move the rest of the way up to 160 when his body was ready to avoid any disadvantage. While he adds plenty of pounds after the weigh-in, he's still coming in comfortably below 160.

Canelo could've begun to acclimate to the division with this most recent fight. Instead, he chose to face a 147-pound contender with both weighing in at 155. Beating an undersized, under-chinned underdog is underwhelming.

So are Canelo and Golden Boy Promotions' actions. They spent the last week of May and first week of June in a courtroom for a lawsuit accusing the promoter of stealing the fighter from another company years ago, an allegation the promoter strongly denies.

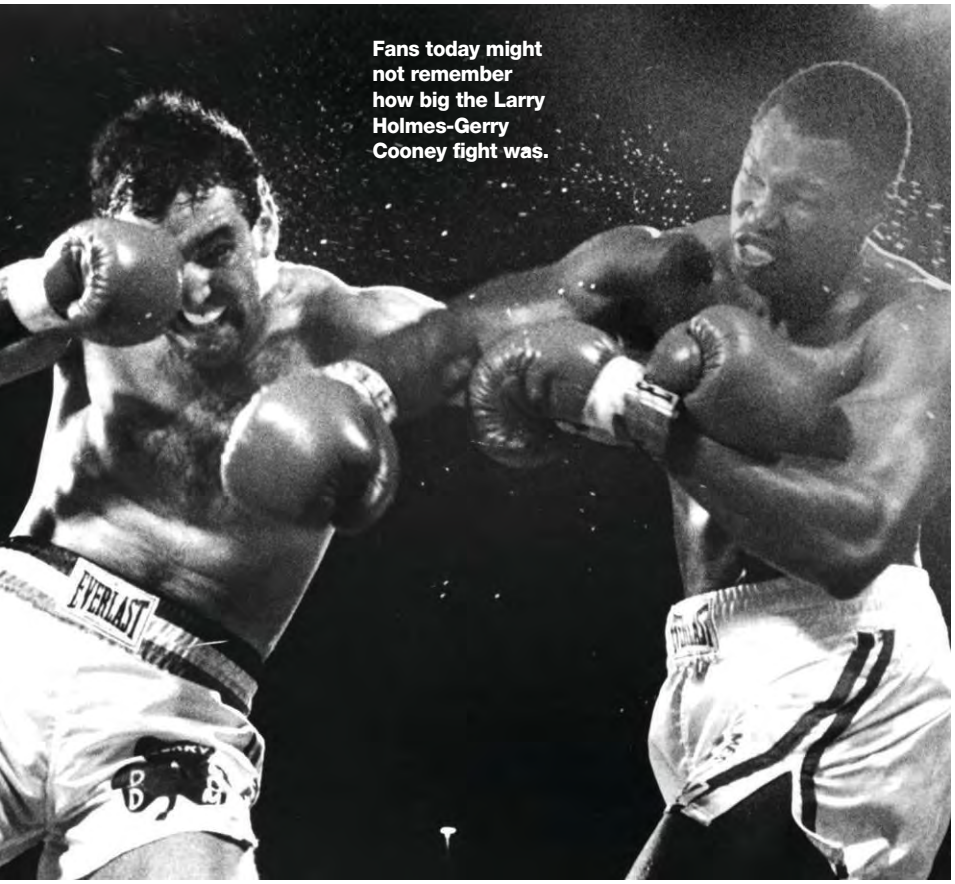
It's a big deal for fighter and promoter alike but the trial is something they knew was approaching. They also saw the WBC's 15-day deadline coming. And yet the fighter paid his sanctioning fee, kept the belt and called out Golovkin.

They literally paid the price with the fee and then figuratively paid the price once more by giving up the title anyway. If all of this is due to the reasons they said – wanting more time to make a fight they say they want – then their offer to Golovkin needs to be good and fair.

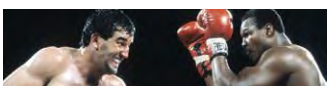
This issue of THE RING went to press in mid-June. From then to the time you're reading this, Canelo and Triple-G might've reached an agreement on a fight in September. It seemed more likely that the fight – if it takes place at all – would happen no sooner than next May.

Either way, I hope negotiations went or will go this way: They should compensate Golovkin well without giving Canelo short shrift and they should allow the bout to be at 160 pounds, where Golovkin is comfortable, where Canelo said he is willing to fight and where Canelo can take pride in knowing that any victory, should it come, would come over the best possible version of his opponent.

Words and actions are too often two different things. It's time for Canelo and Golden Boy to put their money where their mouths are.



Fans today might not remember how big the Larry Holmes-Gerry Cooney fight was.

LARRY HOLMES VS.  GERRY COONEY:

THROUGH THEIR EYES

On June 11, 1982, Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney entered the ring at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas for one of the most highly anticipated fights of all time. In some respects, Holmes-Cooney marked the long-overdue end of an era. It was the last major championship bout to be marketed – and not subtly – as black vs. white.

Cooney was "the great white hope." He didn't want it that way. Ironically, years later, he would learn that one of his maternal great-grandmothers was black. And Holmes was angry, believing that his journey through boxing had been on a road paved with jagged glass while Cooney had traveled on a red carpet.

Countless words have been written about Larry Holmes vs. Gerry Cooney. But the two men who did battle that night have a unique perspective. I talked with them recently. The memories they shared with me follow:

IN THE DRESSING ROOM BEFORE THE FIGHT

Holmes: I did what I always did to get ready ... wait for the time to go by ... stretch ... shadow box ... stay limber ... work up a sweat … windmill both arms. ... Then someone came in and said, "Larry, it's time to go." I asked, "Is Cooney out yet?" The guy said no. And I told him, "I ain't going first. I'm the heavyweight champion of the world." He said, "That's the way they want to do it." And I said, "It's not the way I'm doing it. I'm the champ. Hell, no." So Cooney went first. And right before I left for the ring, I said a prayer, "Lord; don't let me hurt him and don't let him hurt me." I wanted to knock him out but I never wanted to hurt anyone in boxing so that they weren't OK after the fight was done.

Cooney: I was angry about the black-white thing, the way it had been built up and the way Holmes had talked about me. There was nothing I could do except keep my mouth shut and not make it worse. But I was so mad that it was the first time in my career I didn't have butterflies in the dressing room before a fight. I just wanted to go out and hit him.

THE RING WALK

Holmes: Walking to the ring, I saw a lot of white people and a lot of people wearing green. There was people shouting, "N-----, he's gonna kick your ass!" They hated me when I fought Ali and they hated me when I fought Cooney but this was a different kind of hate. I kept saying to myself, "Don't lose your concentration. Stay focused on the fight."

Cooney: I heard the crowd and knew it was behind me. I couldn't see the top of the stands. They seemed to go on forever. People were reaching out to touch me, grabbing at me. I tried to stay focused and went through my game plan: Use the jab, get inside, everything I had to do to win the fight.

THE RING INTRODUCTIONS

Holmes: They introduced me first. That was wrong. I was the champ. I didn't know they were going to do that. All I could do was say to myself,

"OK, it's done. There's nothing you can do to change it now. But when you leave the ring, you're still gonna be the champ."

Cooney: I knew they were going to introduce Larry first. That was Rappaport and Jones (Cooney's co-managers, Dennis Rappaport and Mike Jones) and Don King (Holmes' promoter). I couldn't have cared less.

REFEREE MILLS LANE'S INSTRUCTIONS

Holmes: I remember Gerry looking down during the instructions. And when we touched gloves, I told him, "Let's have a good fight." A lot of people were paying a lot of money to see Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney fight. I wanted them to get their money's worth.

Cooney: I wasn't looking down. When I fought someone, the last impression I wanted them to have of me before the fight started was of me looking at their body, at their ribs, because that's where the punches would be coming. Then Mills Lane said, "Let's get it on," and Larry said, "Let's have a good fight." I still wanted to hurt him. But right then, all the racism went out the window. This was a fight, two guys trying to beat each other. That's all it ever should have been, not a big racial thing.

THE FIGHT

Holmes: In the second round, I threw a one-two that landed on the button and knocked him down. But I still had to be careful because Gerry was a big puncher and he had a lot left. There was a punch he hit me with – a left hook to the body (in the fourth round) – that hurt me bad. The bell went "ding" and ended the round a second after that, which was good because I wasn't feeling so good right then. And the other time he hurt me was with a low blow (in the ninth round). The referee gave me time to recover and deducted two points. Gerry was strong. He hit hard. But I wore him down. I was beating on him pretty good when Victor Valle (Cooney's trainer) stopped it (in the 13th round). The way I felt at the time, I wished it had ended with Gerry on his back and the referee counting to 10. But I'd won so I was happy.

Cooney: So much of what I'd heard before the fight was, I couldn't go the distance. And I fell into that trap. I worried too much about going the distance instead of fighting my fight. In the second round, I got dropped. I remember asking myself, "What are you doing down here?" I know I hurt him a couple of times but he covered up how hurt he was. Mills Lane took a couple of points away from me. That was deflating. I should have told myself, "OK, I'm going to knock him out." Instead, I got discouraged. By the 13th round, I was tired and I was almost like, "Go ahead, hit me. You can't hurt me." Victor Valle wasn't going to let that happen and stopped the fight. Larry had all the tools. He was patient. He was a very smart fighter. His experience won it for him. The truth is, I wasn't ready for him that night. I needed a few more fights.

THE NEXT DAY

Holmes: The next day, Gerry and I did an interview with Howard Cosell. Before it started, I told him, "You're a good fighter. You fought a good fight. Don't let people get you down." You know how people are. The critics, the boxing writers who don't know s--t about boxing. A lot of them turned on Gerry after he lost. "Gerry Cooney is a bum. Gerry Cooney can't fight." Trust me. Gerry Cooney could fight. I know. I was in the ring with him. If Gerry Cooney was young and fighting today, he'd be the best in the world. He was one of the best back then. It's just that he fought a guy who had more than he did that night.

Cooney: I really thought I was going to win the fight. When I lost, I didn't know how to process the emotion. It seemed worse than it was. I felt like a failure. I kept thinking about all the people I'd let down. My father beat me every day when I was a kid and told me I was nothing. I try not to think about that today. I've dealt with it and come to terms with my past. But the day after the fight, I was thinking maybe my father was right. It didn't help that the doctor who stitched me up after the fight had booze on his breath.

LATER

Holmes: There was a distance between me and Gerry after we fought. But I called him from time to time. I do that with some of the guys I fought, just to talk. Win or lose, we shared something important. Then, after a while, Gerry and I started showing up for each other at events and got to know each other as people. I learned about some of the problems he had in his personal life. And I respected the fact that he dealt with his problems in a good way. He doesn't let the bulls--t life throws at you get to him anymore. And the way I feel now, I like Gerry. He's fun to be with. He's articulate, he's a good guy. I'm a nice guy too so it makes sense that we should like each other.

Cooney: Larry Holmes was one of the greatest heavyweights of all time. He was a real champion. As time went by, I came to understand that it was a good fight, that I belonged in the ring with Larry that night. Then he reached out to me and things got good between us. You know, more people in the world were paying attention to Larry and me than anything else that happened that night. That's pretty cool, knowing I was part of that. Looking back, I appreciate now that it was part of my life journey. I wish I'd performed better. But I'm fortunate to have been part of boxing history and to have had that moment. RING

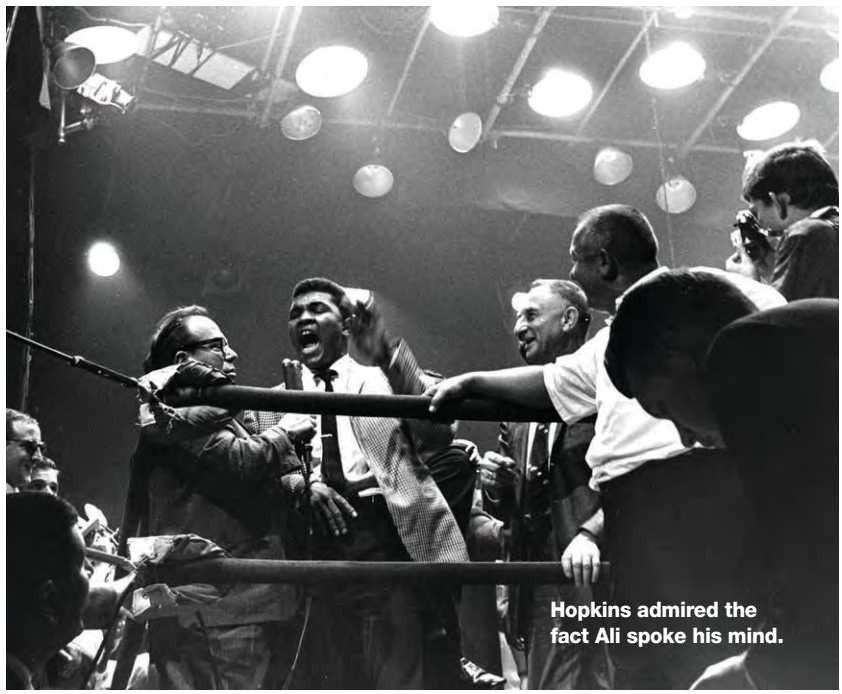
Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hurting Sport: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

By **Bernard Hopkins as told to Joseph Santoliquito**

Bernard Hopkins is relieved that Muhammad Ali is no longer suffering.

‘He stood up when no one else did’

BERNARD HOPKINS REFLECTS ON THE LIFE AND CAREER OF **MUHAMMAD ALI**



Hopkins admired the fact Ali spoke his mind.

This is one in a series of columns by future Hall of Famer Bernard Hopkins, who gives us his thoughts on various subjects important to every boxer and fan. This issue: Hopkins’ thoughts on the late Muhammad Ali.

On a Saturday morning in June, the world woke up to the news that Muhammad Ali died. And although there are a great many fighters who never met “The Greatest,” anyone who has ever put on a pair of boxing gloves is, and will always be, connected to Ali.

The news hit me like a punch. But not in the way you would think. I was relieved for him. I was relieved he was out of his pain.

What I’m going to remember most about Ali is what he said: No Viet Cong ever called me n----- and I’m not going to war when I didn’t pass the (U.S. Army qualifying) test. Now you want me to fight brown people who didn’t do anything to me. … Ali said that because he couldn’t even have coffee down the street at a local coffee shop during that time because he was black. That’s what I’ll remember about Ali: standing up against oppression.

Ali, to me, meant more for what he did outside of the ring than in the ring because during a crucial time in this country that we call great – and it is – he stood up when he didn’t have to. He could have compromised. Superstar athletes today who are making hundreds of millions of dollars won’t say anything about social injustice even though they know they should. LeBron James and some other NBA players put on hoods in support of Trayvon Martin but that is rare. Ali spoke up and these guys today don’t. I was influenced by Ali because he stood up when no one else did.

I had the opportunity to meet Ali a few times. It’s those moments that I’ll pass along to my daughter when I tell her about what “The Greatest” achieved.

I think I actually have a lot in common with Ali.

We’re both outspoken. We both had to reinvent ourselves in the ring. Ali started out as a slick, fast-handed boxer and morphed into a heavier tactician who won as much on his wits as he did on his iron chin. I began my career as a puncher and focused more into a defensive fighter who won with my head.

Ali, to me, was bigger than boxing. They took three years out of the prime of his career. When you talk of Ali, I think of Nelson Mandela. When you talk of Ali, I think of Martin Luther King. When you talk about Ali, I think of Gandhi, someone who had a different fight on his hands.

Christians loved him; Jewish people loved him. There were a lot of people that loved him. That says something about the man’s character. Ali was bigger than boxing. If not for Muhammad Ali, there would be no Bernard Hopkins. Ali was one of my inspirations to get into boxing, along with Joe Frazier.

When I first heard the news Ali died, I was happy because he wasn’t suffering anymore. To me, as a Muslim, you understand you can’t have death without life and life without death. I was rejoicing that his job is done. He used all of the time he had here and he’s out of his pain. I saluted the prince. I thought, “Well done, Champ. Well done.”

No one is ever going to replace him. They’ve tried and will continue to try but there will never be another one like him. RING

CHILD'S PLAY

Lots of boxing to talk about but first I have a personal story if you'll indulge me.

When I was 6 years old there was this toy called "Big Trak." It looked sort of like a heavy-duty, six-wheeled truck out of Battlestar Galactica with a keypad on the back. Using those buttons you encoded simple commands – go 6 feet forward, turn right, make laser noise – and in that way Big Trak could slowly and loudly navigate a carpeted landscape and do cool stuff like startle housecats. I would've gnawed off my left arm to have one.

So one day I'm in the rec room watching TV and a commercial for Big Trak comes on. Christmas was near and I needed to show this ad to my mom but I knew she wouldn't come quickly enough if I just yelled about a commercial. Instead, I put my head between the couch and the wall and screamed. When my frantic mother came running in a few seconds later, I told her that I was stuck.

It's funny to me now because it's so absurd. Who gets their head stuck behind a couch? And who would even fall for a story like that?

Anyway, thanks for letting me share. Not sure why that story was on my mind. Just an amusing little window into the way children think, I guess. It's amazing how their immature brains conjure up these ridiculous scenarios when they're desperate for attention.

So, on to the boxing:

While the media's attention was focused squarely on the upcoming Canelo Alvarez-Amir Khan fight in early May, a rumor began to circulate about retired boxer **Floyd Mayweather Jr.** being in negotiations to fight Irish MMA star **Conor McGregor**. For a few weeks the trash-talk lit up Twitter and sent TMZ into overdrive as people calculated the revenue possibilities and imagined the outcome of a stand-up boxing match between McGregor and the former five-division-ruling pound-for-pound king. By the end of the month, however, it seemed as if a deal had fallen apart. Mayweather later said he'd started the rumor himself.

It still bugs me. I never did get that Big Trak.

Manny Pacquiao reiterated that he is retired after winning a Senate seat in the Philippines in mid-May with over 16 million votes. He was said to be considering an offer to represent his country at the 2016 Olympics but ultimately turned it down in order to "prioritize his legislative duties."

AIBA's official decision to allow paid fighters to compete in the Games came down on June 1 to almost unanimous condemnation from the professional community. Among those who supported the idea was **Khan**, who won a silver medal for Great Britain in 2004 but said he'd be interested in representing Pakistan in Rio.

Heavyweight champion **Tyson Fury** added anti-Semitism to his growing list of bigotries in a video posted on YouTube, warning people not to be "brainwashed" by "Zionist, Jewish people who own all the banks, all the papers, all the TV stations." He also covered some old targets: pedophiles, zoophiles and women. Fury later issued an apology, claiming that "sometimes the heightened media scrutiny has caused me to act out in public."

Jermain Taylor won't see any prison time as long as he avoids trouble for the next six years. The former middleweight champion was convicted on charges related to three separate incidents – shooting his cousin (non-fatally), pulling out a gun at a Martin Luther King Day parade and beating up a guy in rehab – but a judge in Arkansas suspended the sentence.

Showtime filed a lawsuit against **Top Rank, Inc.** in May, claiming the promoter had cost the network around $700,000 (plus interest) in legal fees to deal with customers who felt they'd been misled when buying the Mayweather-Pacquiao pay-per-view. Meanwhile, Top Rank's **Bob Arum** (who has handled Pacquiao) agreed to end his company's $100 million antitrust lawsuit against Premier Boxing Champions mastermind **Al Haymon** (who has represented Mayweather). It's a situation pregnant with possibilities. An Arum/Haymon bromance could mean lots of responsible contact between two of boxing's biggest stables, so let's just hope those upcoming lunch dates aren't tainted by the word "rematch." RING

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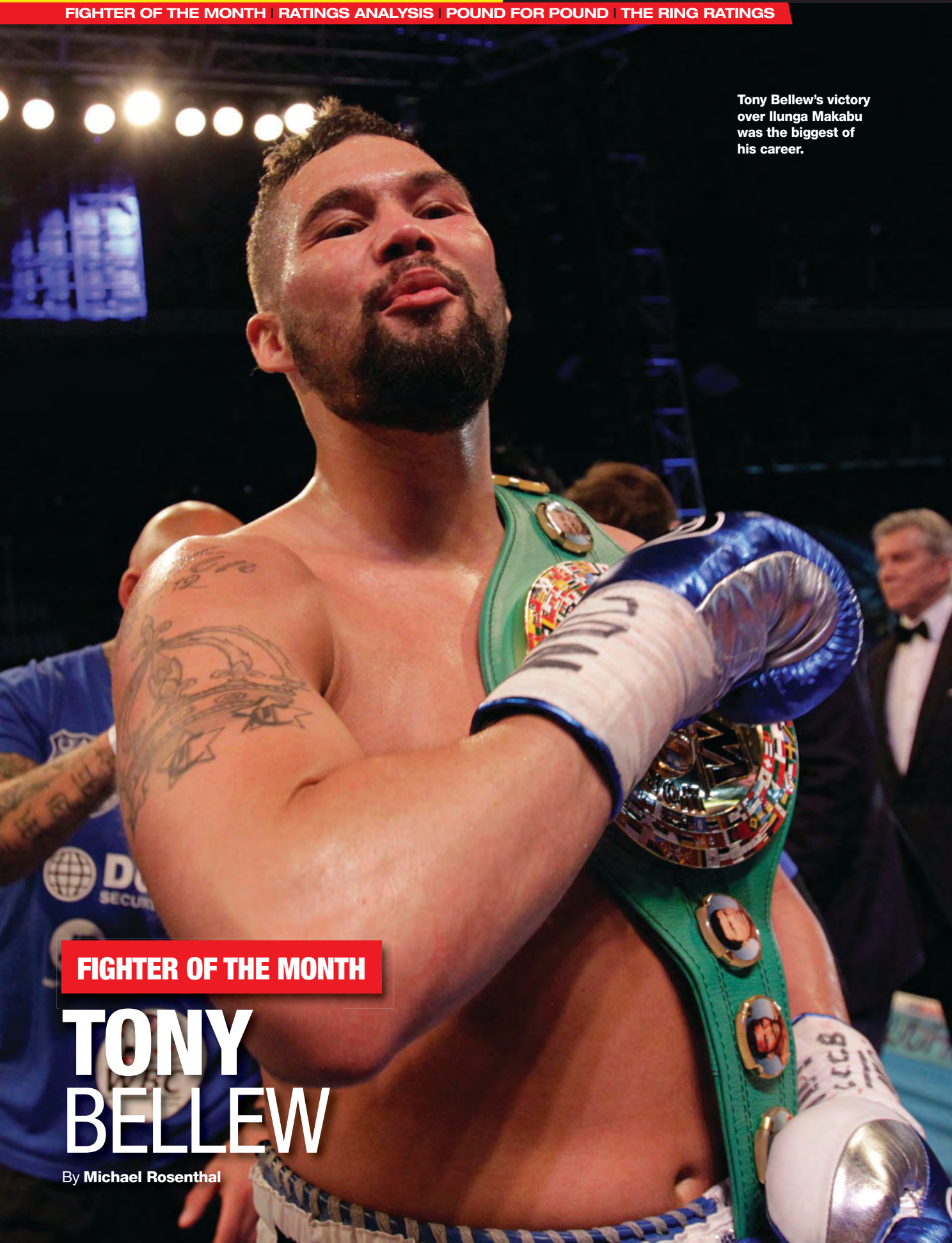


Tony Bellew's victory over Ilunga Makabu was the biggest of his career.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

TONY BELLEW

By **Michael Rosenthal**

Tony Bellew gets up. You can count on that.

The Liverpudlian suffered a huge setback when then-WBC light heavyweight titleholder Adonis Stevenson stopped him in six rounds on Nov. 30, 2013, in Quebec City. Bellew responded by moving up to cruiserweight and winning seven in a row, five by knockout.

He went down hard in the opening round against Ilunga Makabu when they fought for the vacant WBC 200-pound belt on May 29 in Liverpool, suffering a broken nose in the process. His response this time? He punched out the puncher, scoring a spectacular third-round knockout to become a world titleholder.

The end was brutal. Bellew hurt Makabu midway through the round and followed with a vicious barrage with Makbu's back against the ropes until the South African fell to the canvas and was finished. The official end came at 1 minute, 20 seconds of the round.

And remember: Makabu (19-2) was no joke going into the fight. He has 18 knockouts in his 19 victories and was rated No. 5 by THE RING; Bellew was No. 9.

That's what made Bellew's victory so significant. He overcame a significant challenge in spectacular fashion in front of his hometown fans, making it by far the biggest night of his eight-plus year career.

Bellew (27-2-1, 17 knockouts) played the role of a champion in the film "Creed." Now he is the real thing.

"I never thought this would happen in a million years. I did it in the movie. Now I've done it for real and I've done it at Everton," Bellew yelled as 16,000 at the soccer stadium roared their approval.

POUND FOR POUND: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Lucas Browne (No. 9 last month) was removed after being suspended for a failed drug test. Joseph Parker thus moved up a spot and erstwhile Londoner David Haye returned at No. 10. Parker then climbed a spot on his own merit by outpointing Carlos Takam (unrated). Alexander Povetkin (No. 2 last month) was also dropped after his "B" sample tested positive for a banned substance so everyone moved up and undefeated Mexican Andy Ruiz Jr. lumbered in at No. 10.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Mairis Briedis went from No. 10 to No. 9 after stopping Olanrewaju Durodola (unrated) in nine rounds. Denis Lebedev (No. 2 last month) unified a couple titles and bumped Victor Ramirez (No. 9 last month) off the list while Cuba's unrated Yunier Dorticos ejected Youri Kalenga (No. 7 at the time) by stopping him in 10 rounds. The two resulting vacancies were taken by Tony Bellew at No. 9 and Dorticos at No. 10. The following week Bellew dramatically captured a title with a third-round knockout of Ilunga Makabu (No. 5 at the time) and switched rankings with him.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Anthony Dirrell (No. 8 last month) climbed one notch after a first-round knockout of Caleb Truax (unrated).

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: A Las Vegas card featuring a slew of 154-pounders resulted in a shuffle: Vanes Martirosyan dropped from from No. 7 to No. 9 after losing a decision against Erislandy Lara (No. 1) and No. 5-rated Jermall Charlo swapped places with Austin Trout (No. 2 last month) after beating him by a unanimous decision.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Frankie Gomez entered the ratings at No. 9 after shutting out former title challenger Mauricio Herrera (No. 8 at 140 pounds), which pushed Konstantin Ponomarev (No. 10 last month) off the list.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Herrera dropped out after fighting Gomez at 147, which opened up a spot at No. 10 for undefeated American Regis Prograis. Prograis was later displaced by Ricky Burns after Burns stopped Michele Di Rocco (unrated) in eight to win a title.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Anthony Crolla (No. 4 last month) successfully defended his title with a seventh round knockout of Ismael Barroso (unrated) and rose to No. 3. Rances Barthelemy rose from No. 7 to No. 5 after defending his belt (which he soon vacated) by winning a split decision over Mickey Bey (unrated).

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Previously unrated Panamanian Jezreel Corrales crashed the list at No. 3 after upsetting longtime titleholder Takashi Uchiyama, who dropped from No. 1 to No. 6. At the same time, No. 8-rated Bryan Vasquez was removed for inactivity. "Fight of the Year" was in every post-fight story about Francisco Vargas vs. Orlando Salido; Vargas held his spot at No. 1 and Salido climbed from No. 4 to No. 2 after the pair fought to a draw.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No. 3-rated Anselmo Moreno held his spot after winning a unanimous decision over Suriyan Sor Rungvisai, who fell from No. 7 to No. 10. Lee Haskins (No. 6 last month) soundly beat Ivan Morales (unrated) in defense of his title and jumped over Tomoki Kameda to No. 5.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Arthur Villanueva (No. 8 last month) exited after winning a minor title at 118 pounds. The No. 10 spot was taken by Takuma Inoue, younger brother of No. 1-rated Naoya.

FLYWEIGHTS: Johnriel Casimero leaped from No. 10 to No. 4 after pounding then-titleholder Amnat Ruenroeng to the canvas in China. Ruenroeng dropped from No. 2 to No. 6 as a result.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Chao Zhong Xiong (No. 8 last month) lost a split decision to Jose Antonio Martinez and Kosei Tanaka vacated the No. 5 spot after rising to 108 pounds. The two resulting vacancies were snapped up by Riku Kano at No. 9 and Martinez at No. 10.

Junior middleweight Jermall Charlo (left) overcame a stiff challenge from Austin Trout on May 21.

THE FIGURES UNDER THE FIGHTERS' NAMES INDICATE: WEEKS IN THE RATINGS • COUNTRY • RECORD

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C TYSON FURY
225 • U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

1. WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO
577 • Ukraine • 64-4-0 (53 KOs)

2. DEONTAY WILDER
133 • U.S. • 36-0-0 (35 KOs)

3. KUBRAT PULEV
243 • Bulgaria • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)

4. LUIS ORTIZ
25 • Cuba • 25-0-0 (22 KOs)

5. ANTHONY JOSHUA
32 • U.K. • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)

6. BERMANE STIVERNE
163 • Canada • 25-2-1 (21 KOs)

7. JOSEPH PARKER
9 • New Zealand • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

8. BRYANT JENNINGS
117 • U.S. • 19-2-0 (10 KOs)

9. DAVID HAYE
4 • U.K. • 28-2-0 (26 KOs)

10. ANDY RUIZ JR.
1 • Mexico • 27-0-0 (18 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GRIGORY DROZD
140 • Russia • 40-1-0 (28 KOs)

2. DENIS LEBEDEV
332 • Russia • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)

3. KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
43 • Poland • 26-0-0 (16 KOs)

4. MARCO HUCK
222 • Germany • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)

5. TONY BELLEW
3 • U.K. • 27-2-1 (17 KOs)

6. FIRAT ARSLAN
188 • Germany • 37-8-2 (23 KOs)

7. OLEKSANDR USYK
36 • Ukraine • 9-0-0 (9 KOs)

8. MAIRIS BRIEDIS
15 • Latvia • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

9. ILUNGA MAKABU
152 • Congo • 19-2-0 (18 KOs)

10. YUNIER DORTICOS
3 • Cuba • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. SERGEY KOVALEV
177 • Russia • 29-0-1 (26 KOs)

2. ADONIS STEVENSON
157 • Canada • 27-1-0 (22 KOs)

3. BERNARD HOPKINS
523 • U.S. • 55-7-2 (32 KOs)

4. ELEIDER ALVAREZ
117 • Colombia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)

5. ANDRE WARD
11 • U.S. • 29-0-0 (15 KOs)

6. JUERGEN BRAEHMER
206 • Germany • 48-2-0 (35 KOs)

7. ISAAC CHILEMBA
215 • Malawi • 24-3-2 (10 KOs)

8. ANDRZEJ FONFARA
108 • Poland • 28-3-0 (16 KOs)

9. ARTUR BETERBIEV
78 • Russia • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)

10. VYACHESLAV SHABRANSKYY
25 • Ukraine • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. JAMES DEGALE
157 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (14 KOs)

2. BADOU JACK
59 • Sweden • 20-1-2 (12 KOs)

3. GILBERTO RAMIREZ
100 • Mexico • 34-0-0 (24 KOs)

4. ANDRE DIRRELL
93 • U.S. • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)

5. GEORGE GROVES
235 • U.K. • 23-3-0 (18 KOs)

6. CALLUM SMITH
53 • U.K. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

7. ANTHONY DIRRELL
95 • U.S. • 29-1-1 (23 KOs)

8. ARTHUR ABRAHAM
348 • Armenia • 44-5-0 (29 KOs)

9. FELIX STURM
16 • Germany • 40-5-3 (18 KOs)

10. FEDOR CHUDINOV
57 • Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C CANELO ALVAREZ
29 • Mexico • 47-1-1 (33 KOs)

1. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
235 • Kaz. • 35-0-0 (32 KOs)

2. DANIEL JACOBS
78 • U.S. • 31-1-0 (28 KOs)

3. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
80 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (12 KOs)

4. DAVID LEMIEUX
54 • Canada • 35-3-0 (32 KOs)

5. ANDY LEE
78 • Ireland • 34-3-1 (24 KOs)

6. PETER QUILLIN
210 • U.S. • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)

7. CHRIS EUBANK JR.
61 • U.K. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)

8. HASSAN N'DAM
125 • Cameroon • 33-2-0 (19 KOs)

9. DANIEL GEALE
365 • Australia • 31-4-0 (16 KOs)

10. AVTANDIL KHURTSIDZE
14 • Georgia • 32-2-2 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. ERISLANDY LARA
258 • Cuba • 23-2-2 (13 KOs)

2. JERMALL CHARLO
104 • U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)

3. MIGUEL COTTO
29 • P.R. • 40-5-0 (33 KOs)

4. JERMELL CHARLO
135 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

5. AUSTIN TROUT
210 • U.S. • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)

6. DEMETRIUS ANDRADE
34 • U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

7. JULIAN WILLIAMS
78 • U.S. • 22-0-1 (14 KOs)

8. LIAM SMITH
39 • U.K. • 23-0-1 (13 KOs)

9. VANES MARTIROSYAN
340 • U.S. • 36-3-1 (21 KOs)

10. CARLOS MOLINA
258 • Mexico • 25-6-2 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KELL BROOK
268 • U.K. • 36-0-0 (25 KOs)

2. AMIR KHAN
110 • U.K. • 31-4-0 (19 KOs)

3. KEITH THURMAN
170 • U.S. • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)

4. SHAWN PORTER
131 • U.S. • 26-1-1 (16 KOs)

5. TIM BRADLEY
209 • U.S. • 33-2-1 (13 KOs)

6. DANNY GARCIA
45 • U.S. • 32-0-0 (18 KOs)

7. ERROL SPENCE
36 • U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

8. JESSIE VARGAS
14 • U.S. • 27-1-0 (10 KOs)

9. KONSTANTIN PONOMAREV
9 • Ukraine • 30-0-0 (13 KOs)

10. FRANKIE GOMEZ
5 • U.S. • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. VIKTOR POSTOL
147 • Ukraine • 28-0-0 (12 KOs)

2. TERENCE CRAWFORD
60 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (20 KOs)

3. RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV
184 • Russia • 25-4-0 (18 KOs)

4. LUCAS MATTHYSSE
270 • Argentina • 37-4-0 (34 KOs)

5. ADRIEN BRONER
110 • U.S. • 32-2-0 (24 KOs)

6. ANTONIO OROZCO
36 • U.S. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

7. EDUARD TROYANOVSKY
28 • Russia • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

8. ADRIAN GRANADOS
14 • U.S. • 17-4-2 (12 KOs)

9. JACK CATTERALL
11 • U.K. • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)

10. RICKY BURNS
2 • U.K. • 40-5-1 (14 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. JORGE LINARES
118 • Venezuela • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

2. DEJAN ZLATICANIN
61 • Montenegro • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

3. ANTHONY CROLLA
33 • U.K. • 31-4-3 (13 KOs)

4. TERRY FLANAGAN
35 • U.K. • 30-0-0 (12 KOs)

5. RANCES BARTHELEMY
25 • Cuba • 25-0-0 (14 KOs)

6. SHARIF BOGERE
84 • Uganda • 28-1-0 (19 KOs)

7. RICHARD COMMEY
54 • Ghana • 24-0-0 (22 KOs)

8. DENIS SHAFIKOV
61 • Russia • 36-2-1 (19 KOs)

9. ROBERT EASTER
10 • U.S. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

10. FELIX VERDEJO
8 • Puerto Rico • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. FRANCISCO VARGAS
100 • Mexico • 23-0-2 (17 KOs)

2. ORLANDO SALIDO
90 • Mexico • 43-13-4 (30 KOs)

3. TAKASHI MIURA
166 • Japan • 30-3-2 (23 KOs)

4. JEZREEL CORRALES
6 • Panama • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)

5. ROMAN MARTINEZ
405 • P.R. • 29-2-3 (17 KOs)

6. TAKASHI UCHIYAMA
336 • Japan • 24-1-1 (20 KOs)

7. JAVIER FORTUNA
84 • Dom. Rep. • 29-0-1 (21 KOs)

8. JOSE PEDRAZA
73 • P.R. • 22-0-0 (12 KOs)

9. SAUL RODRIGUEZ
29 • U.S. • 20-0-1 (15 KOs)

10. NICHOLAS WALTERS
25 • Jamaica • 26-0-1 (21 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. VASYL LOMACHENKO
110 • Ukraine • 5-1-0 (3 KOs)

2. GARY RUSSELL JR.
63 • U.S. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)

3. LEO SANTA CRUZ
41 • U.S. • 32-0-1 (18 KOs)

4. LEE SELBY
117 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)

5. ABNER MARES
162 • Mexico • 29-2-1 (15 KOs)

6. SIMPIWE VETYEKA
131 • S. Africa • 29-3-0 (17 KOs)

7. JESUS CUELLAR
87 • Argentina • 28-1-0 (21 KOs)

8. SATOSHI HOSONO
25 • Japan • 31-2-1 (20 KOs)

9. OSCAR VALDEZ
9 • Mexico • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

10. JOSEPH DIAZ JR.
11 • U.S. • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
292 • Cuba • 16-0-0 (10 KOs)

2. CARL FRAMPTON
194 • U.K. • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)

3. SCOTT QUIGG
185 • U.K. • 31-1-2 (23 KOs)

4. NONITO DONAIRE
63 • Phil. • 37-3-0 (24 KOs)

5. GENESIS SERVANIA
117 • Phil. • 27-0-0 (11 KOs)

6. SHINGO WAKE
81 • Japan • 20-4-2 (12 KOs)

7. ALBERT PAGARA
75 • Phil. • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)

8. REY VARGAS
78 • Mexico • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

9. JESSIE MAGDALENO
52 • U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

10. HUGO RUIZ
15 • Mexico • 36-3-0 (32 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING'S Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his champion weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Records provided by boxrec.com

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **SHINSUKE YAMANAKA**
240 • Japan • 25-0-2 (17 KOs)
2. **JUAN CARLOS PAYANO**
89 • Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)
3. **ANSELMO MORENO**
428 • Panama • 36-4-1 (12 KOs)
4. **JAMIE MCDONNELL**
162 • U.K. • 28-2-1 (13 KOs)
5. **LEE HASKINS**
52 • U.K. • 33-3-0 (14 KOs)
6. **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
149 • Japan • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)
7. **PUNGLUANG SOR SINGYU**
38 • Thailand • 52-3-0 (35 KOs)
8. **MARLON TAPALES**
25 • Phil. • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
9. **ZOLANI TETE**
13 • S. Africa • 24-3-0 (20 KOs)
10. **SURIYAN SOR RUNGVISAI**
47 • Thailand • 46-7-1 (23 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **NAOYA INOUE**
75 • Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
2. **CARLOS CUADRAS**
214 • Mexico • 35-0-1 (27 KOs)
3. **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
162 • Thailand • 39-4-1 (36 KOs)
4. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
318 • Argentina • 45-2-2 (24 KOs)
5. **MCJOE ARROYO**
104 • P.R. • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)
6. **KOHEI KONO**
34 • Japan • 32-8-1 (13 KOs)
7. **OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI**
193 • Thailand • 60-1-1 (23 KOs)
8. **LUIS CONCEPCION**
38 • Panama • 34-4-0 (24 KOs)
9. **KHALID YAFAI**
13 • U.K. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
10. **TAKUMA INOUE**
1 • Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
135 • Nicaragua • 45-0-0 (38 KOs)

1. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
166 • Mexico • 33-2-0 (24 KOs)
2. **KAZUTO IOKA**
90 • Japan • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)
3. **BRIAN VILORIA**
257 • U.S. • 36-5-0 (22 KOs)
4. **JOHNRIEL CASIMERO**
35 • Phil. • 22-3-0 (14 KOs)
5. **MORUTI MTHALANE**
117 • S. Africa • 32-2-0 (21 KOs)
6. **AMNAT RUENROENG**
109 • Thailand • 17-1-0 (5 KOs)
7. **EDGAR SOSA**
213 • Mexico • 52-9-0 (30 KOs)
8. **JUAN CARLOS REVECO**
245 • Argentina • 36-3-0 (19 KOs)
9. **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
92 • P.R. • 16-3-0 (14 KOs)
10. **NAWAPHON POR CHOKCHAI**
50 • Thailand • 34-0-0 (27 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C **DONNIE NIETES**
244 • Phil. • 38-1-4 (22 KOs)

1. **RYOICHI TAGUCHI**
78 • Japan • 24-2-1 (11 KOs)
2. **RANDY PETALCORIN**
109 • Phil. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
3. **PEDRO GUEVARA**
167 • Mexico • 27-2-1 (17 KOs)
4. **AKIRA YAEGASHI**
23 • Japan • 24-5-0 (12 KOs)
5. **JAVIER MENDOZA**
61 • Mexico • 24-3-1 (19 KOs)
6. **MILAN MELINDO**
82 • Phil. • 34-2-0 (12 KOs)
7. **ALBERTO ROSSEL**
163 • Peru • 34-9-0 (13 KOs)
8. **GANIGAN LOPEZ**
14 • Mexico • 27-6-0 (17 KOs)
9. **REY LORETO**
61 • Phil. • 22-13-0 (14 KOs)
10. **MOISES FUENTES**
8 • Mexico • 24-2-1 (13 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
260 • Thailand • 42-0-0 (17 KOs)
2. **BYRON ROJAS**
12 • Nicaragua • 17-2-3 (8 KOs)
3. **HEKKIE BUDLER**
194 • S. Africa • 29-2-0 (9 KOs)
4. **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
88 • Thailand • 12-0-0 (6 KOs)
5. **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
23 • Mexico • 17-3-1 (10 KOs)
6. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
167 • Japan • 30-8-0 (12 KOs)
7. **DENVER CUELLO**
82 • Phil. • 36-5-6 (24 KOs)
8. **CARLOS BUITRAGO**
191 • Nicaragua • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)
9. **RIKU KANO**
2 • Japan • 10-1-1 (5 KOs)
10. **JOSE JIMENEZ**
2 • Colombia • 17-5-1 (7 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

1. **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
105 • Nicaragua • 45-0-0 (38 KOs)
2. **SERGEY KOVALEV**
65 • Russia • 29-0-1 (26 KOs)
3. **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
69 • Kazakhstan • 35-0-0 (32 KOs)
4. **ANDRE WARD**
39 • U.S. • 29-0-0 (15 KOs)
5. **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
146 • Cuba • 16-0-0 (10 KOs)
6. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
58 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (20 KOs)
7. **CANELO ALVAREZ**
29 • Mexico • 47-1-1 (33 KOs)
8. **SHINSUKE YAMANAKA**
56 • Japan • 25-0-2 (17 KOs)
9. **NAOYA INOUE**
9 • Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
10. **KELL BROOK**
9 • U.K. • 36-0-0 (25 KOs)

THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" samp e wil not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings

A boxer who is removed because of a positive test wi have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

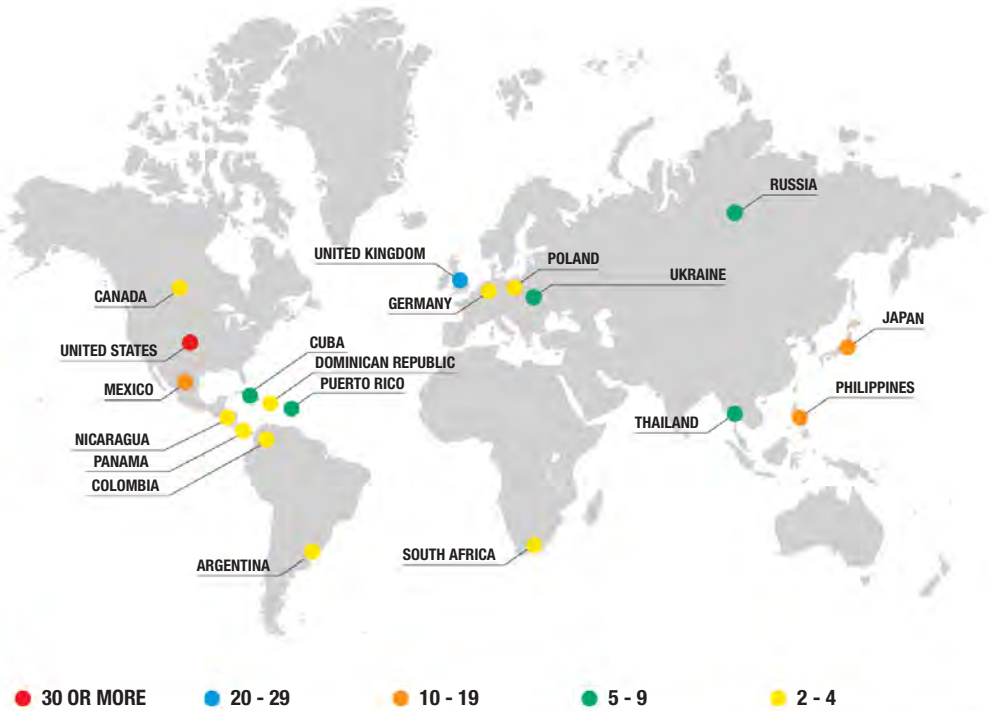
A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

RATED FIGHTERS BY COUNTRY

●	UNITED STATES	32	
●	UNITED KINGDOM	22	▲ 3
●	MEXICO	18	▲ 1
●	JAPAN	14	▲ 1
●	PHILIPPINES	10	▼ 1
●	RUSSIA	8	▼ 2
●	THAILAND	8	
●	PUERTO RICO	6	
●	UKRAINE	6	
●	CUBA	5	▲ 1
●	ARGENTINA	4	▼ 1
●	GERMANY	4	
●	SOUTH AFRICA	4	
●	CANADA	3	
●	NICARAGUA	3	
●	PANAMA	3	▲ 1
●	COLOMBIA	2	▲ 1
●	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	2	
●	POLAND	2	
	ARMENIA	1	
	AUSTRALIA	1	▼ 1
	BULGARIA	1	
	CAMEROON	1	
	CONGO	1	▼ 1
	GEORGIA	1	
	GHANA	1	
	IRELAND	1	
	JAMAICA	1	
	KAZAKHSTAN	1	
	LATVIA	1	
	MALAWI	1	
	MONTENEGRO	1	
	NEW ZEALAND	1	
	PERU	1	
	SWEDEN	1	
	UGANDA	1	
	VENEZUELA	1	

Countries out (from last month): *China, Costa Rica*

Countries in: *None*



U.S. VS. U.K.

The U.S. has dominated the RING Ratings since we instituted the Ratings by Country feature. And that probably won't change any time soon. That said, the surging U.K. added three more rated fighters this month while the U.S. held steady. Nothing is impossible. Here's how the nations compare:

DIVISION	U.S	U.K.
HEAVYWEIGHTS	2	3
CRUISERWEIGHTS	0	1
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS	2	0
SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS	2	3
MIDDLEWEIGHTS	2	2
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS	6	1
WELTERWEIGHTS	7	2
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS	4	2
LIGHTWEIGHTS	1	2
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS	1	0
FEATHERWEIGHTS	3	1
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS	1	2
BANTAMWEIGHTS	0	2
JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS	0	1
FLYWEIGHTS	1	0
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS	0	0
STRAWWEIGHTS	0	0
TOTAL	32	22

WELL REPRESENTED

Mexico once challenged the U.S. in the number of fighters rated by THE RING. Now, after a prolonged slump, Mexico has the third most rated fighters and is only four ahead of fourth-place Japan. One area where Mexico remains strong is representation in the most number of divisions (among 17) with at least one rated fighter. Here's a look:

12 UNITED KINGDOM

12 UNITED STATES

11 MEXICO

8 JAPAN

6 UKRAINE

5 CUBA

5 PHILIPPINES

5 PUERTO RICO

5 RUSSIA

4 ARGENTINA

4 SOUTH AFRICA

FOCUS ON . . .

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

A breakdown of THE RING Top 10 in one division each month, plus a list of fighters on the cusp of breaking through. This month: the 115-pounders.

Naoya Inoue is one of four undefeated fighters in the junior bantamweight ratings.

MOST WEEKS RATED: OMAR NARVAEZ **318**

FEWEST WEEKS RATED: TAKUMA INOUE **1**

OLDEST: NARVAEZ **40**

YOUNGEST: TAKUMA INOUE **20**

MOST FIGHTS: OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI **62**

FEWEST FIGHTS: TAKUMA INOUE **7**

HIGHEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: MCJOE ARROYO, NAOYA INOUE, TAKUMA INOUE, KHALID YAFAI **100 PERCENT**

LOWEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: KOHEI KONO **78 PERCENT**

MOST KOS: SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI **36**

FEWEST KOS: TAKUMA INOUE **2**

LONGEST CURRENT WINNING STREAK: SITHSAMERCHAI **25 FIGHTS**

ON THE POUND-FOR-POUND LIST: NAOYA INOUE **NO. 9**

TITLEHOLDERS IN THE TOP 10: ARROYO **(IBF)**, KONO **(WBA)**, CUADRAS **(WBC)**, INOUE **(WBO)**

ON THE CUSP (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER): PAUL BUTLER, JAMIE CONLAN, SHO ISHIDA, TOSHIYUKI IGARASHI, REX TSO

OLD SCHOOL 8

THE RING staff members' current champions in the original eight weight classes.

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LIGHTWEIGHT: JORGE LINARES
FEATHERWEIGHT: GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
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LIGHTWEIGHT: JORGE LINARES
FEATHERWEIGHT: GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: ROMAN GONZALEZ

Note: *This is how the weights break down: Heavyweight includes cruiserweight, light heavyweight includes super middleweight, all divisions middleweight through flyweight include the "junior" versions, and flyweight also includes strawweight.*

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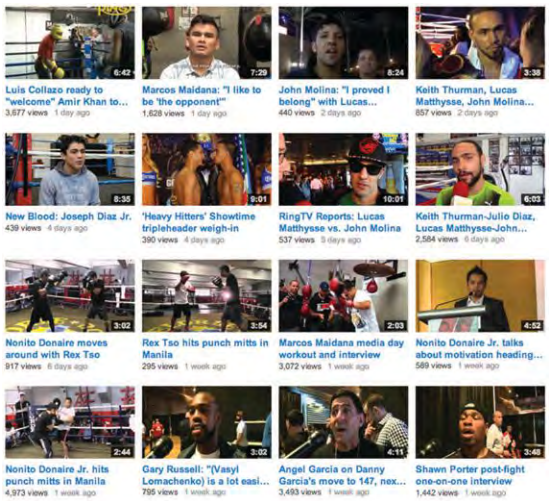

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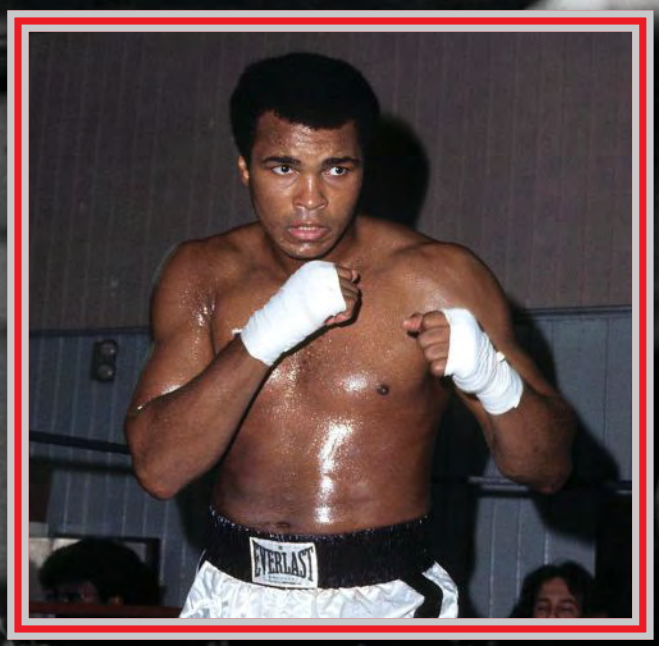

PEOPLE'S CHAMP

MUHAMMAD ALI WAS ONCE POLARIZING BUT ULTIMATELY BECAME A RALLYING POINT

By **Norm Frauenheim**

The memories are personal. They continue to gather in a deep and endless collection of moments in an elevator, or on the street, or at a ballgame. Muhammad Ali's legacy is in how people recall that single moment when he whispered in their ear, or threw a playful jab in their face.

Ali was a People's Champ, for sure. But he was more, oh-so-much more. In death, he has been resurrected. The world's collective memory of him is inexhaustible and sometimes imaginative. It's also hard to explain.

There's the young man who rumbled and the old one trapped within Parkinson's' terrible silence and everything in between. It's as if his face is a collage of what people see – or hope to see – in themselves.

In the days since Ali died, age 74, at 9:10 p.m. Pacific Time on June 3 at a hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona, he has been called transformational, fearless, humane, controversial, a visionary, cruel, scary, a puncher and a poet.

"Uniquely American," said retired HBO broadcaster

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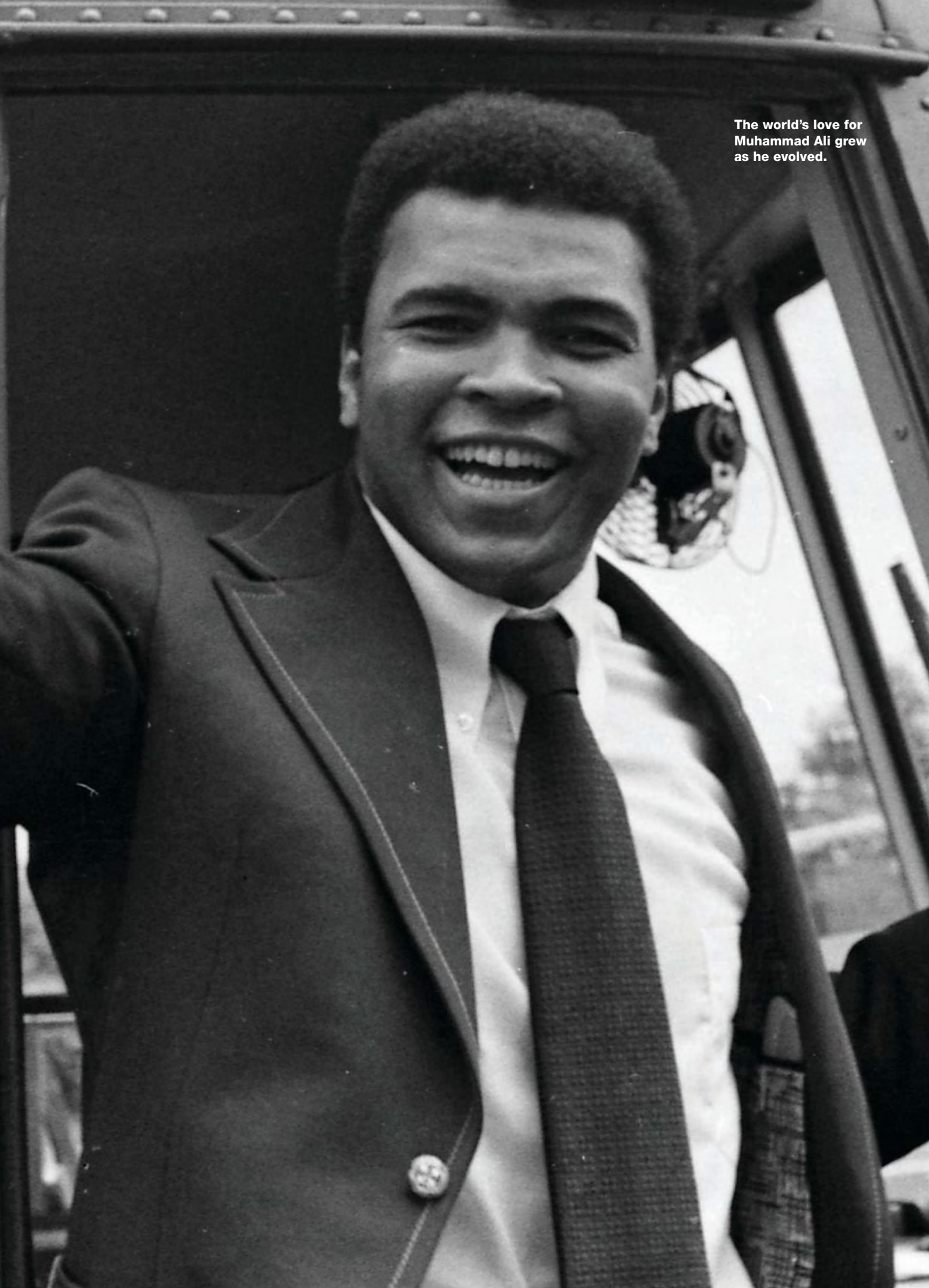


The world's love for Muhammad Ali grew as he evolved.

THE TRIBUTES

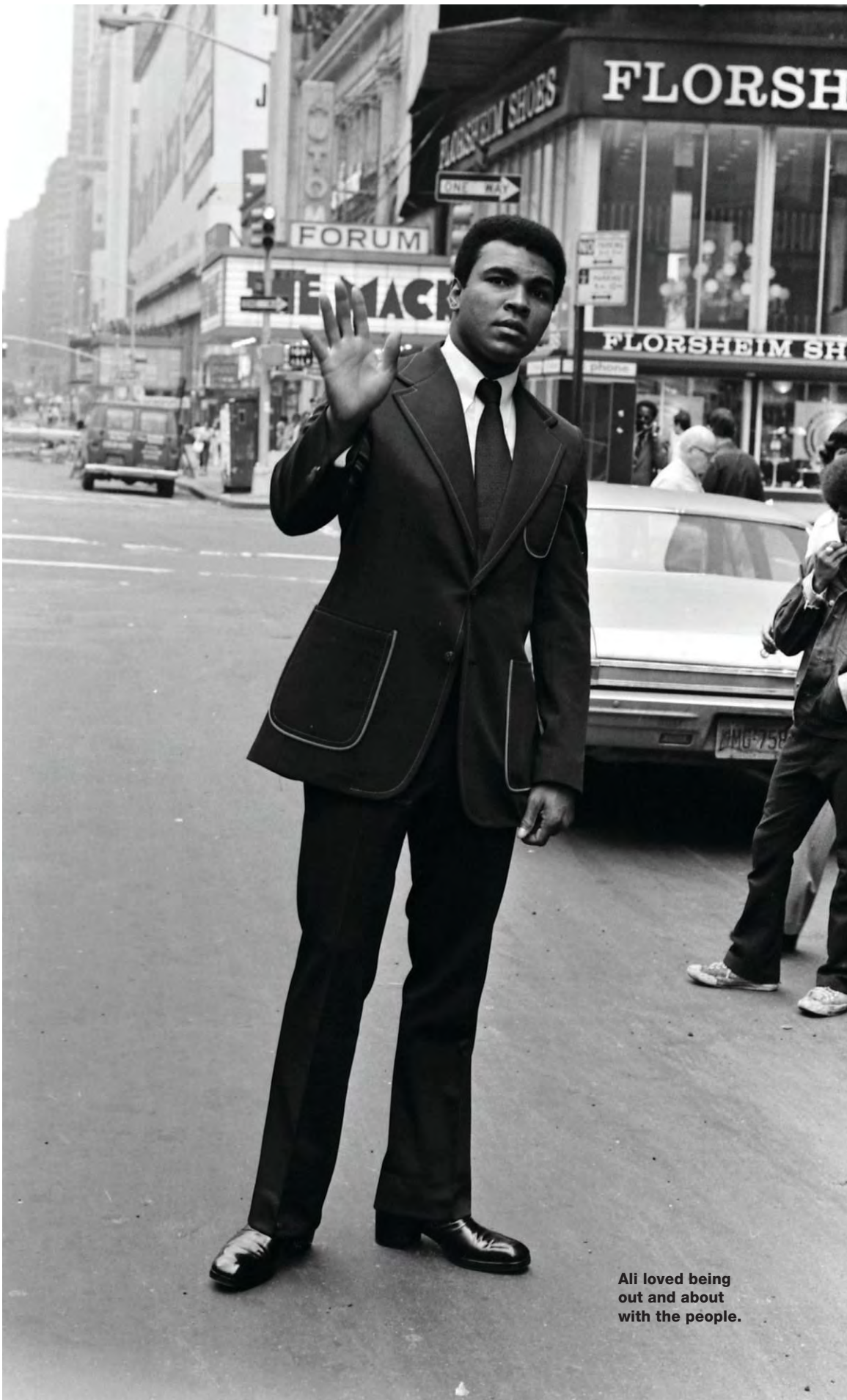
Prominent figures worldwide reacted with sadness to the passing of Muhammad Ali. Here are the thoughts of some of them.

He stood with King and Mandela; stood up when it was hard; spoke out when others wouldn't. His fight outside the ring would cost him his title and his public standing. It would earn him enemies on the left and the right, make him reviled, and nearly send him to jail. But Ali stood his ground. And his victory helped us get used to the America we recognize today.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

I gave Ali the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005 and wondered aloud how he stayed so pretty throughout so many fights. It probably had to do with his beautiful soul. … Muhammad Ali was an iconic and historic figure who thrilled, entertained, influenced, and inspired millions.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



Ali loved being out and about with the people.

Larry Merchant, who was at ringside as a sportswriter for defining Ali fights in New York, Zaire and Manila. "An improvisational genius, kind of a Mark Twain with boxing gloves on."

There's something for everyone in who he was, who he became and who he still is. Ali did what nobody would have ever predicted when he was at his polarizing best as a heavyweight champion with as many opinions as punches during the divided 1960s. He became a unifying force.

How that happened is the overriding theme to what Merchant calls his uniquely American character. Ali always changed and – more important perhaps – was never afraid to.

He embraced change in himself and was transformational because the people he challenged and fought on both sides of the ropes eventually changed too.

There's no better example than George Foreman. Foreman was the Mike Tyson of his time before he faced Ali in the 1974 Rumble in the Jungle in Zaire. Foreman was feared, an angry man who used to bully people on the streets of Houston's Fifth Ward.

"I really was a monster," Foreman said.

Few gave Ali any chance at beating Foreman. If anything, there was fear for what might happen to Ali in the face of Foreman's lethal power, which bounced Joe Frazier off the canvas like a soccer ball with six knockdowns within two rounds in a 1973 title fight in Kingston, Jamaica.

Yet on Oct. 30, 1974, Ali surprised his corner with the rope-a-dope, a tactic then and an enduring metaphor now. Ali endured punishment from one of the biggest power punchers in history.

It was a risk and perhaps a reason for the Parkinson's that would show up a decade later. But the fearless Ali did it anyway, exhausting and taunting Foreman before knocking him out in the eighth round to win the second title in his three lineal championships.

The loss, Foreman's first, shattered his confidence. He had lost his title. Lost his identity. Foreman returned to the ring in 1976 and fought six times, losing the sixth bout to Jimmy Young. That's when he quit. He preached on street corners and wondered what had happened to him on that night, Halloween's eve, in Zaire.

Foreman finally figured out Ali had changed him. For the better.

"Just my association with him transformed me," Foreman said.

In 1987, Foreman resumed his career. Physically, he was slower, but his personality was more agile than it had ever been when he was an angry young man. The sullen heavyweight of the 1970s was reborn as a celebrity with quips about cheeseburgers. He had become a hugely successful businessman with a grill to sell. And he had an ambition to become the oldest heavyweight champ in history. On Nov. 5, 1994, in Las Vegas, Foreman, then 45, achieved the boxing goal, scoring a 10th-round stoppage of Michael Moorer at the MGM Grand.

None of it would have happened, Foreman said, without Ali.

''We were like one guy," Foreman said on the morning after Ali's death. ''But this morning I realized that the greatest piece of us all was Muhammad Ali."

In Ali, Foreman experienced what so many seem to have found in the legendary fighter, who bragged about being The Greatest, yet also displayed a common touch and reassuring charisma.

Within the rap-like lyrics that included the promise of how and when he'd knock out Frazier or Foreman or whomever else was next, there was never the fear of losing.

Like anybody else, Ali didn't seek defeat. But there was always the sense that he understood its inevitability. Ali was prepared for it, first in the ring and then over the final 32 years of his life battling Parkinson's.

It can be argued that the substance to his claim on being The Greatest rests in how he responded to defeat. In this era of the wealth gap, the one percent has insulated itself from loss in much the same way that the unbeaten Floyd Mayweather Jr. protects his "0" and claim on being TBE – The Best Ever. Instead of challenging Gennady Golovkin, Mayweather talks about a circus charade against mixed-martial arts star Conor McGregor.

Without defeat, Ali would never have confronted the truest test of character. It rests in dealing with loss, coming back from it, especially in a sport so defined by adversity.

Ali won his third lineal title on Sept. 15, 1978, a unanimous decision over Leon Spinks in a rematch of his split-decision loss to Spinks seven months earlier.

He beat Foreman for the title in his 15th fight since losing to Frazier in 1971's so-called

Today we bow our heads at the loss of a man who did so much for America. Tomorrow, we will raise our heads again remembering that his bravery, his outspokenness, and his sacrifice for the sake of his community and country lives on in the best part of each of us.

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

If the measure of greatness is to gladden the heart of every human being on the face of the earth, then he truly was the greatest. In every way he was the bravest, the kindest and the most excellent of men.

BOB DYLAN

Muhammad was my idol … an inspiration to me. To have had the opportunity to fight "The Greatest" was truly a life-changing experience. The world has lost a legend, a great warrior, but more importantly, an incredible humanitarian.

LEON SPINKS

Today, as we reflect on his life, let us remember a man who pursued greatness in everything he did and be inspired to hold ourselves to that same standard. Rest in peace, my friend.

OSCAR DE LA HOYA

A true great has left us. Muhammad Ali transformed this country and impacted the world with his spirit. His legacy will be part of our history for all time.

BOB ARUM

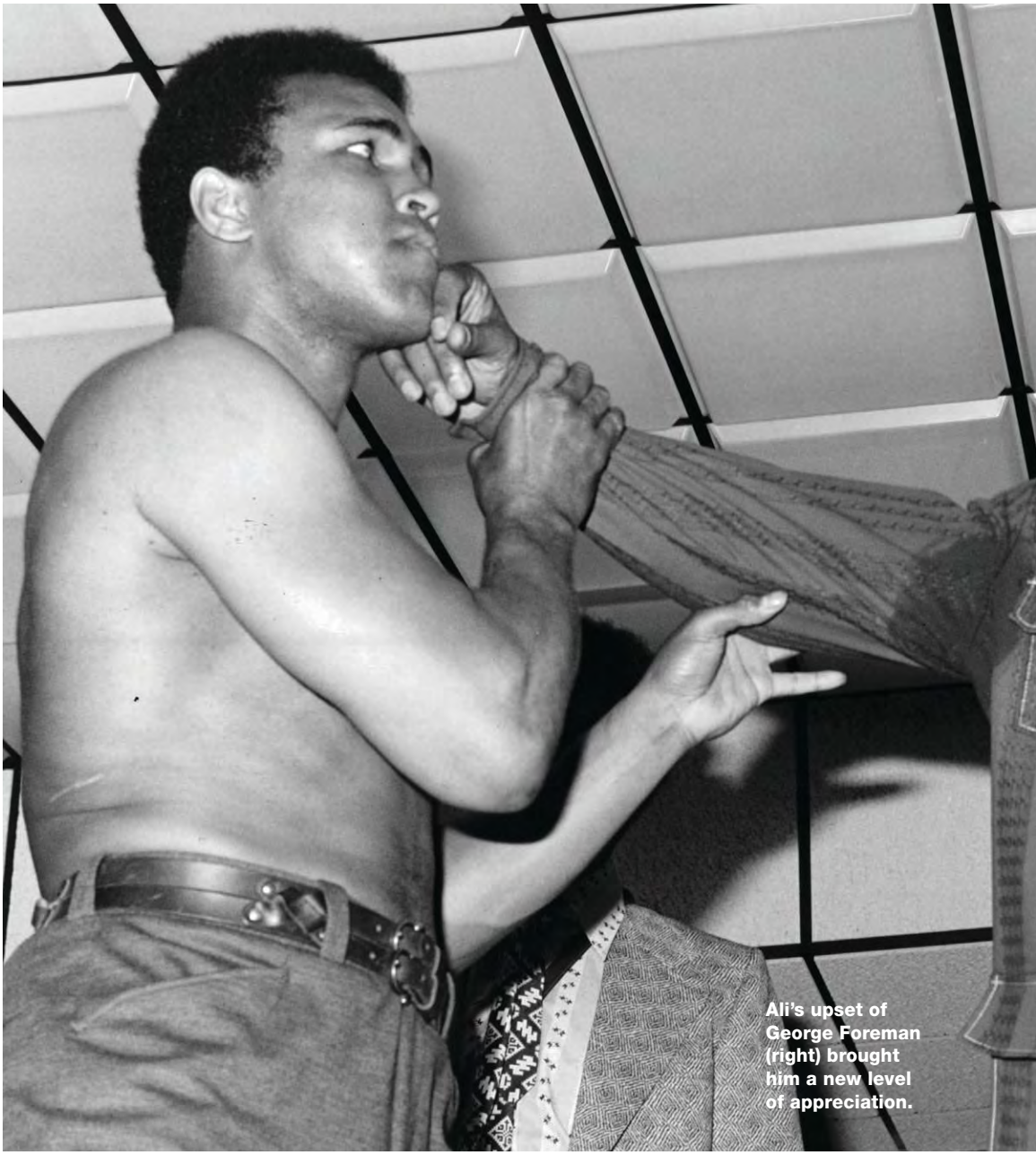
THE TRIBUTES
From Twitter

Ali, Frazier & Foreman, we were (one) guy. A part of me slipped away, 'the greatest piece' Muhammad Ali.

GEORGE FOREMAN

The world has lost an incredible legend. I have lost a phenomenal friend and mentor. Much love.

LARRY HOLMES



Ali's upset of George Foreman (right) brought him a new level of appreciation.

Fight of the Century at New York's Madison Square Garden. The 15-fight run included a 1974 victory by unanimous decision over Frazier and a 1973 rematch in which he scored a split decision over Ken Norton, who beat him and broke his jaw in their first one. He called himself The Greatest, and he proved it – again and again – by coming back.

His toughest loss, perhaps, came about as the result of a three-year, four-month suspension – June 28, 1967 to Oct. 26, 1970 – for refusing to be drafted into the Army. He opposed the Vietnam War.

"I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong," he said then, famously or infamously, depending on the perspective.

Here's a personal story, my Ali moment: A couple of years before Ali said no to the draft and was subsequently convicted in a case overturned by the Supreme Court, I was a kid, an Army brat, living in base housing at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.

It's where I first got interested in boxing. In my early and mid teens, I'd wander over to the barracks and watch battalion smokers. It was also where and when I first heard about Ali. He had beaten Sonny Liston in 1964 for his first title and then changed his name from Cassius Clay to his Muslim name.

Then I started seeing the famous Neil

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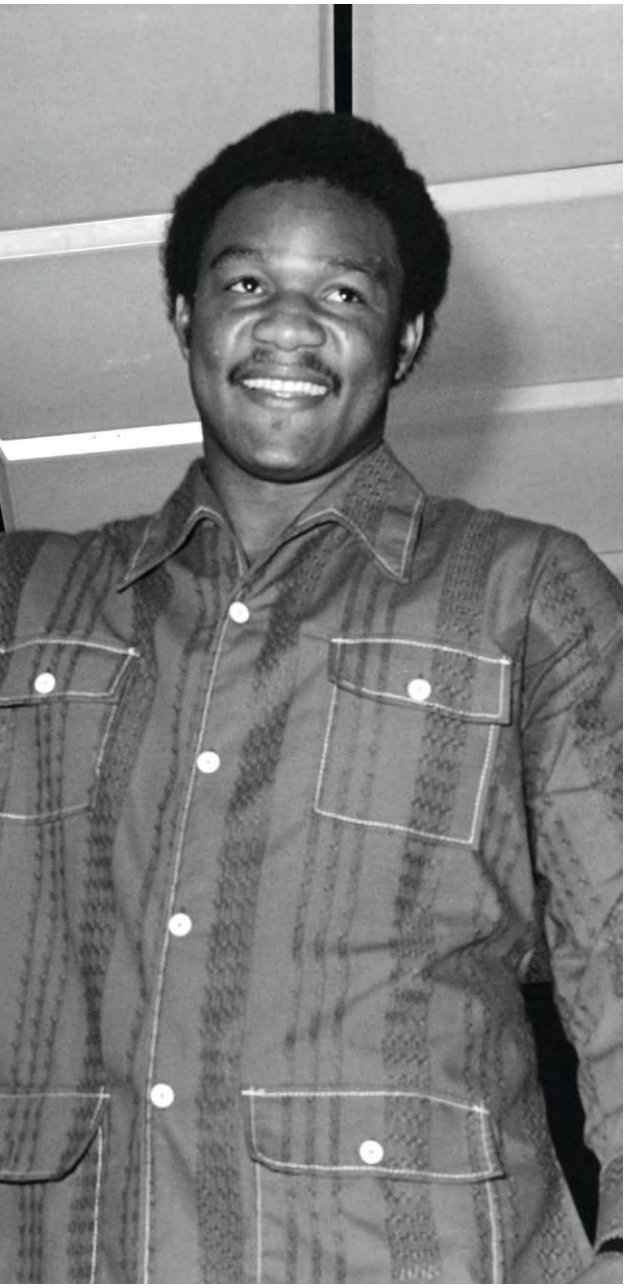


Leifer photo of Ali standing over a fallen Liston, celebrating a victory in their May 1965 rematch, on the walls of young African-American troops who lived in the barracks. That December, those same troops, all part of the 25th Infantry Division, began to deploy to Vietnam. Within weeks, I began to see some return in body bags.

When Ali refused to be drafted, I thought of those body bags. I was offended, angry. But not as angry as my father, a career soldier who had fought his way across Europe in World War II.

My dad and I used to watch the Friday night fights on a black-and-white television. He was a Joe Louis fan. He was part of the generation that could tell you exactly where they where when they heard about Louis' first-round stoppage of Max Schmeling in their 1938 rematch. He admired Louis as a fighter and for his military service. What Ali did enraged him. Then, in 1968, he went to Vietnam.

Thirteen months later, he came back a changed man. He didn't talk much about Vietnam, if at all. He didn't talk about Ali, either. In my conversations with him, I never mentioned Ali, although by then I had come to admire him for his stand even though I was still uncomfortable with the memory of the body bags.

My dad is gone now. But I think of him, especially now in the wake of Ali's death. I don't think my dad could ever have been an Ali fan. But I have a hunch he would have developed a grudging admiration for him.

Ali didn't serve but he paid a real price in giving up his prime years and the money that would have been there for him. His hitch would have been two years in a unit that would have used his charisma and celebrity in a mission to boost morale. He would not have had to fight the Viet Cong.

My dad, like Ali, knew hypocrisy when he saw it. Ali's opposition to that war was his way of saying that American wealth and blood, much of it African-American, was being wasted in a civil war in Southeast Asia while an American war over civil rights was still underway in Birmingham and Selma. It wasn't that Ali didn't want to serve his country. He just wanted to serve in the right place. And right time. He did.

In the end, my dad probably would have been a lot like Foreman. Ali would have changed his mind. Arizona Senator John McCain is another example. McCain is also a former military man, an ex-Navy pilot and American hero who spent 5½ years as a prisoner of war after his fighter jet was shot down over Hanoi on Oct. 26, 1967, nearly four months after Ali refused to be drafted.

McCain, a former amateur boxer at the Naval Academy, would go on to write federal legislation in an attempt to reform boxing's business practices. McCain named it the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act.

"He was a friend and a longtime hero of mine for his trademark dedication and fearlessness, both in and out of the ring," McCain said.

The fearlessness was always there, before

God came for this champion. So long great one.

MIKE TYSON

I will thank God for bringing this incredible man into my life! RIP Champ.

RAY LEONARD

My heart is deeply saddened yet both appreciative and relieved that the greatest is now resting in the greatest place.

ROY JONES JR.

Today my heart goes out to a pioneer, a true legend, and a hero. Not a day went by entering the gym that I didn't think of you.

FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.

A giant among men, Ali displayed a greatness in talent, courage & conviction, that most of us will NEVER be able to truly comprehend.

LENNOX LEWIS

REFER TO MORE STORIES ON THE WEBSITE HERE

Thousands bid Ali farewell the day of his funeral.

RIP to the GOAT. A man of character, faith, dignity and professionalism. You'll continue to inspire us to make this world a better place.

WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO

My idol has left us. I will always remember you as the best and will follow your example. Your legend will live forever.

CANELO ALVAREZ

We've lost a giant in Muhammad Ali. He did things his own way and I am so appreciative to have known him for so long. God rest his soul.

HANK AARON

Ali, the G-O-A-T. A giant, an inspiration, a man of peace, a warrior for the cure. Thank you.

MICHAEL J. FOX

For the greatest man I have ever known: http://bit.do/ali-crystal.

BILLY CRYSTAL

ALI'S FINAL JOURNEY

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky – You could feel his presence. It was everywhere on a sweltering, shirt-soaked day in the old city by the side of the Ohio River, into which he supposedly threw his gold medal.

People lined every street of Muhammad Ali's hometown on the afternoon of June 10 to celebrate the life of "The Greatest." Among them were many who had known him in the old days. Teachers, rival fighters who will be forever remembered just because they fought him, neighbors who nodded to him on his way to the gym.

Then there were the fans, thousands upon thousands of them. Black and white. Young and old. Men and women. Christians and Muslims and Jews. Famous and regular everyday people. All unified by him. They paid homage to him by holding signs aloft, yelling his famous phrases. Lamp posts throughout Louisville were adorned with posters of his likeness, some underlined by the phrase, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

Rose petals were sprinkled along the 19-mile funeral parade route, which was peppered by camera crews and talking heads, many probably not knowing the difference between a left hook and a clothes hook. They were there simply to capture the moment. The procession of cars went past the Muhammad Ali Center, down Muhammad Ali Boulevard, by Ali's alma mater, Central High School, before arriving at Cave Hill Cemetery, where soldiers from the Civil War are buried.

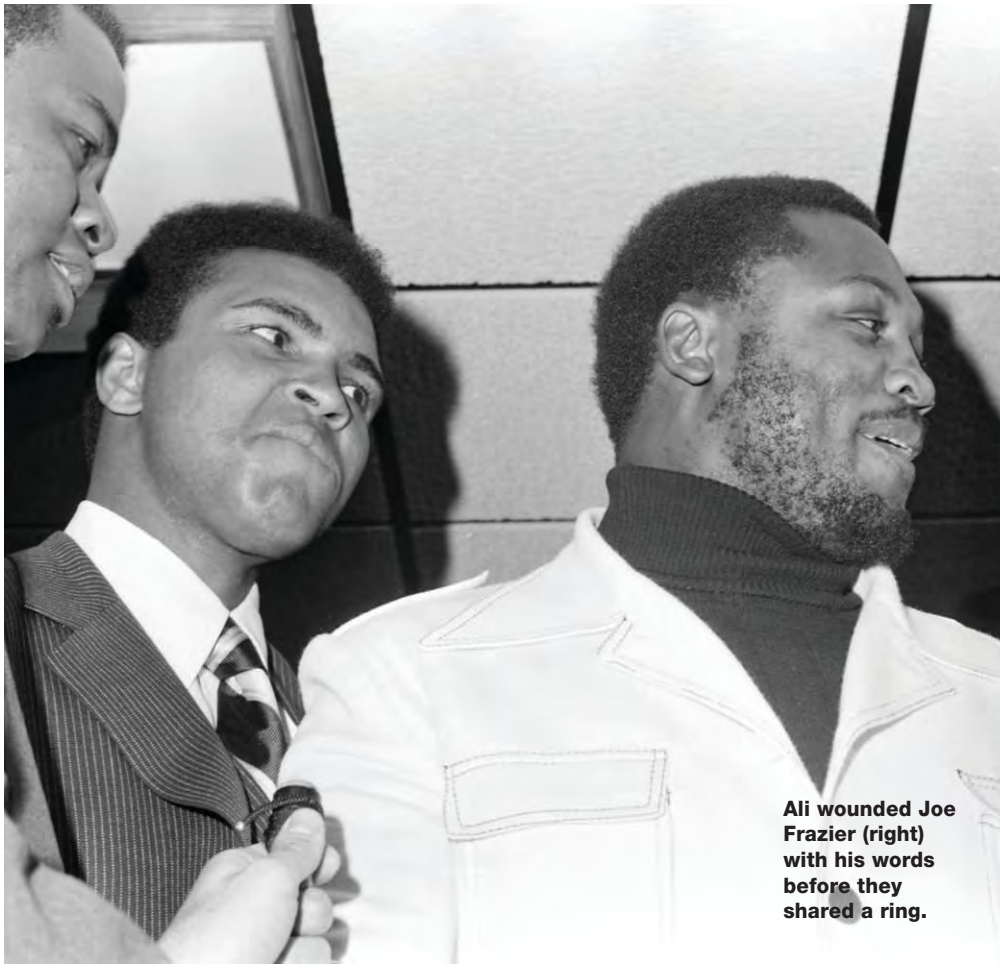
The Spalding University Center, where Ali learned to box, displayed a red bike symbolizing the one that launched Ali's career after it was stolen when he was 12. Up the street once stood the very restaurant that refused to serve Ali lunch because he was black. An angered Ali threw the gold medal he won at the Rome Olympics into the river. Or so the story goes.

There always has been doubt about that tale. But there was never a doubt about Ali's incredible impact.

"I love the man," said Larry Holmes, the only fighter to have stopped Ali. "My fight with him was terrible. It still bothers me. I was his sparring partner for four years and he taught me everything I knew. I didn't want to fight him. I didn't want to hurt him. I knew what he had and I knew what he didn't have. I told him during the fight that I loved him. He told me, 'Why are you beating me up then?'

"Look at all of these people. They love him. He would have loved this. He's at peace now. That's what is important to me. My friend is with God now."

ADREES LATIF/REUTERS; THE RING MAGAZINE



Ali wounded Joe Frazier (right) with his words before they shared a ring.

Parkinson's and throughout the long fight against the disease. Over the last three decades of his life, Ali moved away from some of the controversial causes that defined him as a fighter.

Throughout many of the eulogies and memories of Ali, there's a repeated mention of a cruel streak. A fighter without one isn't much of fighter. But that cruelty was expressed mostly in how Ali treated Frazier, a proud African-American and a sharecropper's son whom Ali managed to turn into an Uncle Tom.

Before Ali won their punishing rubber match in Manila in 1975, he used rhetoric that wounded Frazier in a way Frazier would never forget. In the pre-fight hype, Ali said the bout would be a "killa and a thrilla and a chilla when I get that gorilla in Manila."

Ali also came to regret the insults, telling the New York Times in 2001 that he was sorry for the slurs.

"I said a lot of things in the heat of the moment that I shouldn't have," he said. "I apologize for that. I'm sorry."

Frazier resented Ali for many years, including 1996 when he mocked Ali's shaking hands before the stirring moment when he lit the torch at opening ceremonies for the Atlanta Olympics.

But old enemies often become old comrades and it looked as if that's where the Ali-Frazier relationship was headed before Frazier's death from liver cancer on Nov. 7, 2011. Ali attended Frazier's funeral.

"I will always remember Joe with respect and admiration," Ali said then.

In some ways perhaps, Frazier taught him the first real hard lesson about dealing with defeat. Ali was never afraid to confront adversity throughout a life that, first and foremost, told everybody that it's OK to lose as long as you always come back.

Ali has always come back, thanks to all the moments – big and small – remembered by so many.

"Even if boxing disappears from this planet, Muhammad Ali will be remembered, loud and clear," Foreman said.

Rest in peace, Champ. RING

Thinking of Muhammd Ali and remembering a man who was not afraid to take a stand and who was committed to being his authentic self.

BILLIE JEAN KING

The world has lost a great Champion. Muhammad Ali, lover of human beings, a warrior for the fight against discrimination ... a great friend.

JIM BROWN

Rest in peace to "The Greatest" Muhammad Ali. The one who always made me know that it is cool to be comfortable in my own skin.

ALLEN IVERSON

You'll always be The Greatest for more than just what you did in the ring. A champion to so many people in so many ways.

TIGER WOODS

He was unafraid to be his authentic self and in doing so became one of the greatest human beings ever. RIP Champ.

JASON COLLINS

TRULY ONE OF 'THE GREATEST'

MUHAMMAD ALI THE BOXER CAME IN TWO INCARNATIONS AND BOTH VERSIONS WERE SUPERB

By **Ron Borges**

Sometimes it seemed as if we forgot Muhammad Ali could fight. Not just for the causes of racial and social justice, religious freedom and peace and understanding in the world but inside a boxing ring.

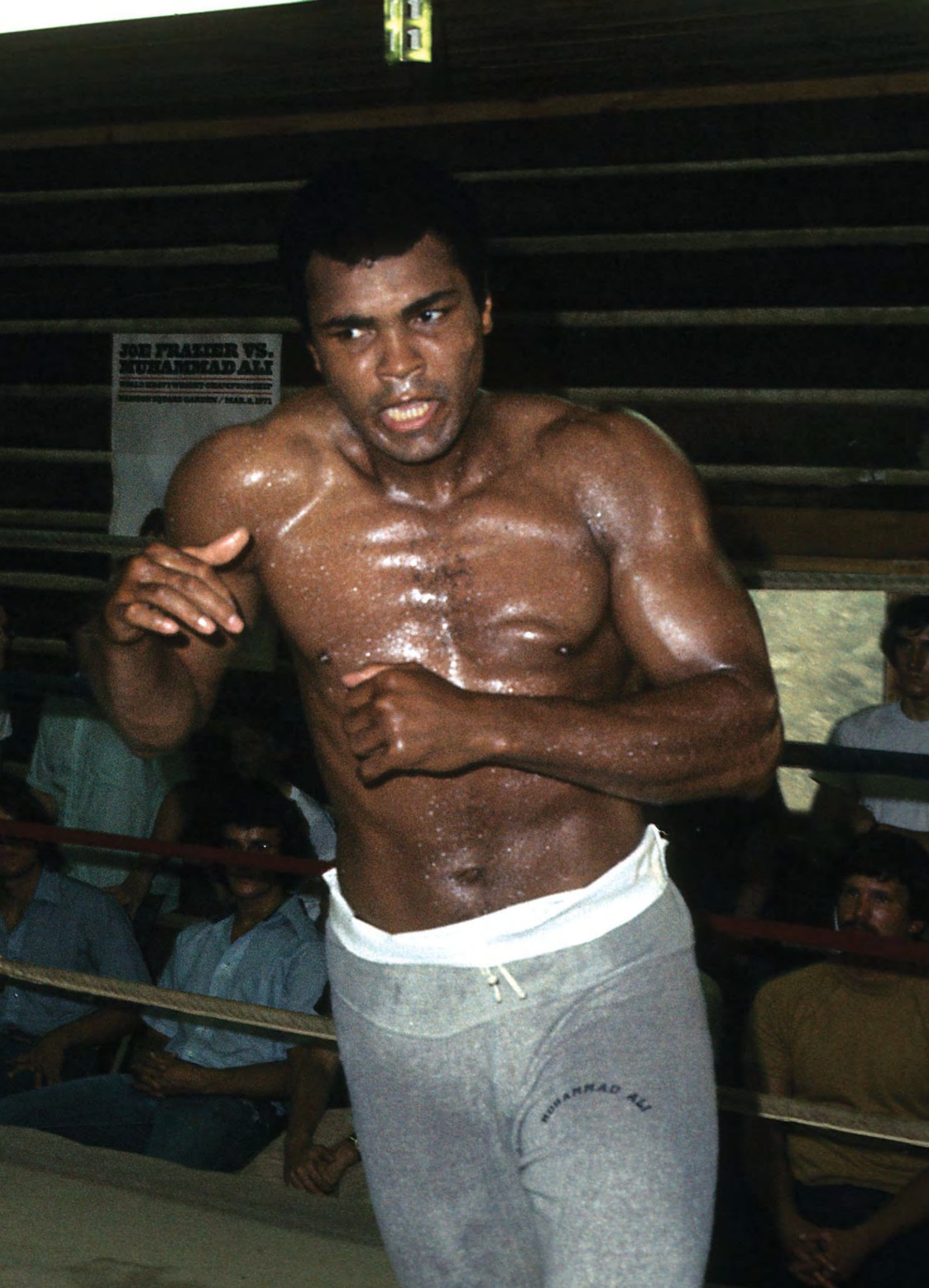
Although it was boxing that gave Ali the platform he used to become the most famous athlete in history and one of the most influential people of his time, lost in the Ali shuffle was the fact the man could box.

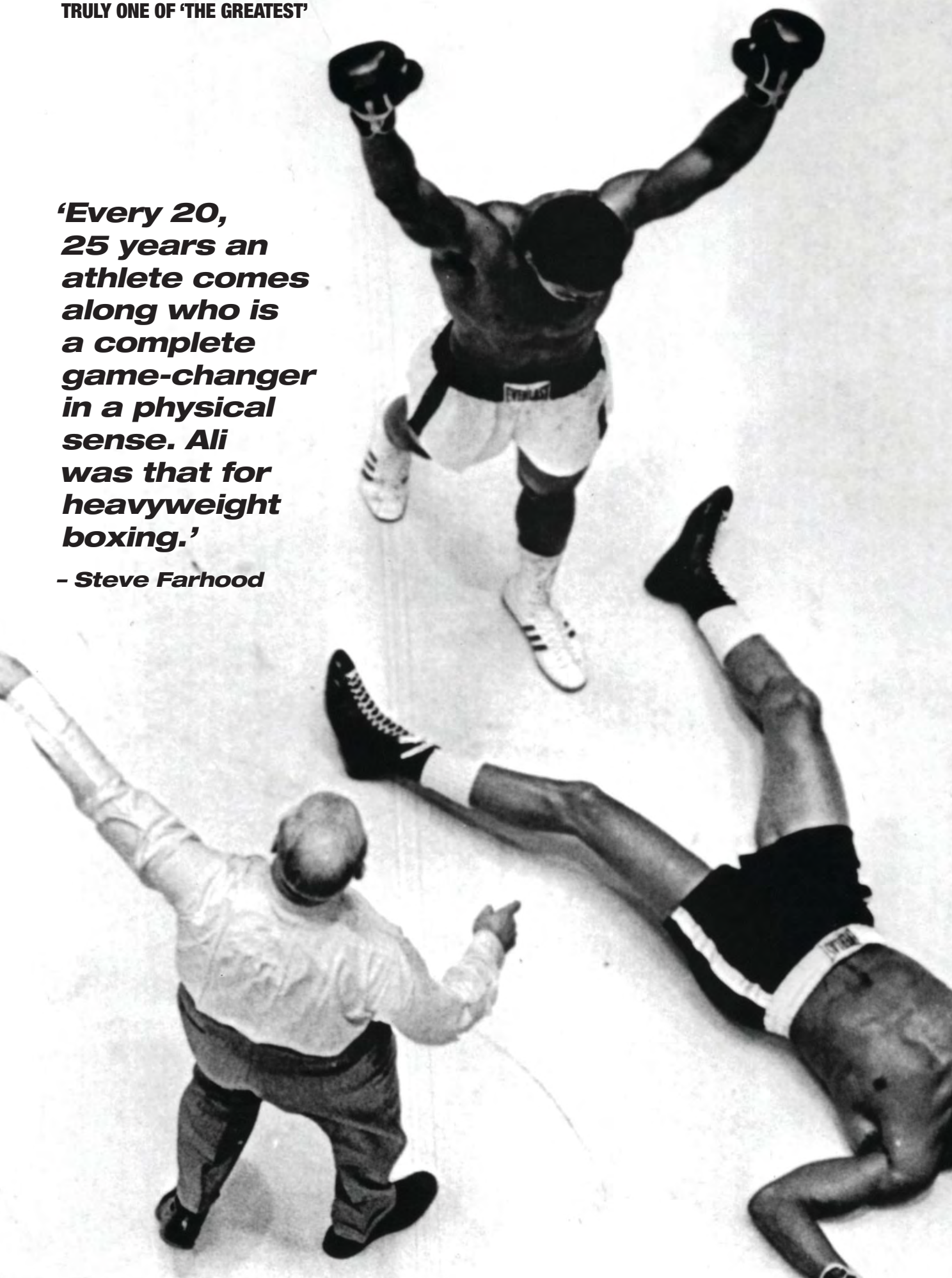
When Ali passed away on June 3 as a result of septic shock after a prolonged battle with Parkinson's disease, the tributes were immediate and unending. ESPN's SportsCenter gave nearly all of several days of broadcasts to his legacy. News channels like CNN did lengthy segments on his life. Social media was atwitter in a way Ali would have loved, with tributes from athletes, political figures and the common man.

All were well-deserved and hard-earned but most focused not on the way he took out Cleveland Williams out in stunning fashion but rather on his fights against the United States government after he refused induction into the military on the grounds of being a conscientious objector, thus beginning a 3½-year exile from boxing that ended only after his conviction on draft-evasion charges was overturned unanimously by the Supreme Court

Much was said and written about his high-profile conversion to Islam and his name change from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali, which was announced immediately after first winning the heavyweight title from Sonny Liston in 1964. Twice in a matter of days he had, for the first but not the last time, "shocked the world!" He did that first with his boxing skills, it should be noted.

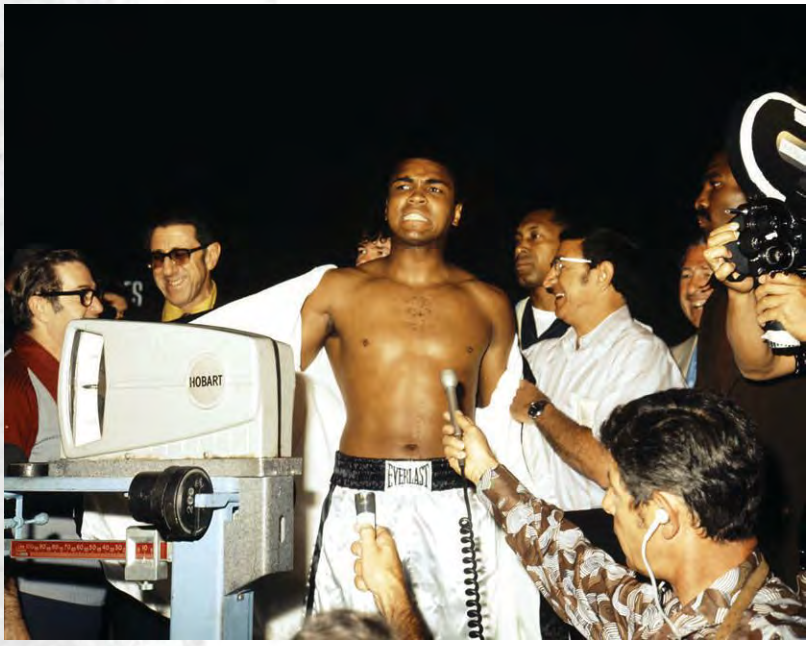
Muhammad Ali's combination of God-given talent and mental strength made him formidable.


JOE FRAZIER VS.
MUHAMMAD ALI
MUHAMMAD ALI



'Every 20, 25 years an athlete comes along who is a complete game-changer in a physical sense. Ali was that for heavyweight boxing.'

– Steve Farhood



Ali was a performer at his weigh-ins but had bad intentions in the ring.

Many believe Ali was at his best when he knocked out Cleveland Williams in 1966.

The great gifts of speed, nimbleness, deadly accurate punching and a stinging jab that flicked out with the same ominous warnings of worse to come as a rattlesnake's tongue, were the first signs of greatness in Muhammad Ali. They came before his oratory, his humor, his courage and his long-held insistence on racial and religious freedom and social justice for people long downtrodden and ill-treated. To remember that he was a boxer first is not to trivialize all he stood for. It is only to remind us what gave him the worldwide stage he strode upon.

It was Ali the Boxer who allowed Ali the Man to flourish. Had he not possessed arguably the fastest hands and feet heavyweight boxing has ever seen, he might well have still taken the social positions he did. But would they have carried the same weight? Would a glib porter or fast-talking salesman who converted to the Nation of Islam have had the same impact on the world as the heavyweight champion? Obviously not. So to shortchange recollections of that side of Ali is ill-advised, for it was the foundation for all he accomplished.

Heavyweight boxing in the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the time when Ali reigned supreme among heavyweights whether he was wearing a champion's belt or not, was the division's greatest and most competitive era. To be heavyweight champion in those days carried a gravitas it no longer does because boxing was not only a mainstream endeavor but one of the most significant sports in the country.

It was not a niche sport, as it has become today for many. A boxing match featuring Muhammad Ali was front-page news. It was an international event watched for free on television on a Saturday afternoon or as a closed-circuit broadcast in movie theatres around the world.

It was a time when the depth of world-class heavyweights was never greater and so the climb to the top was steeper. Ali was two different fighters during this time, separated by nearly four years of government-imposed exile. In both cases he was a genius of fistic jazz. He was not Glenn Miller, keeping the beat. He was Miles Davis altering it in ways unfathomable to the rest of us.

Technically, he did so many things wrong it made your head spin. He didn't so much slip punches as pull straight back from them, one of the most fundamentally unsound moves in boxing. He made it work.

He fought often with his hands slung low, in his pockets if boxing trunks had pockets. That dangerously exposed his chin and made boxing's elders warn that he would be a resident of the sport's dark room once a skilled opponent nailed him. They seldom did in his first iteration and in the second he took the blows he used to elude and fought with steely determination.

Joe Frazier put him down ... once. Henry Cooper did it ... once. But seldom did anyone else come close to hitting him in those early years because, like Miles Davis, Muhammad Ali the Boxer made wrong right.

"Every 20, 25 years an athlete comes along who is a complete game-changer in a physical sense," said Showtime analyst and boxing historian Steve Farhood. "Ali was that for heavyweight boxing.

"At 6-3 and 215 pounds he was big for his time but until Ali the bigger heavyweights were all lumbering, slow-

footed guys. They couldn't move. He was the fastest heavyweight in history. It was those superior physical skills that allowed him to get away with all his technical deficiencies. Despite them, he was so fast he barely got hit in his first run."

He dominated the division not only in that first incarnation as the fastest heavyweight boxing has ever seen but also in the second, when he returned to the ring on Oct. 26, 1970, after a 43-month layoff when his boxing license was suspended in every state in the Union and his passport revoked so he could not ply his trade overseas. He came back not to face some tune-up hump but rather Jerry Quarry, a title contender who had lost bids for the heavyweight championship to Jimmy Ellis by majority decision and stoppage to Joe Frazier. Quarry was as relentless as a termite and tougher to navigate than 10 miles of detour. Ali stopped Quarry on cuts in three rounds.

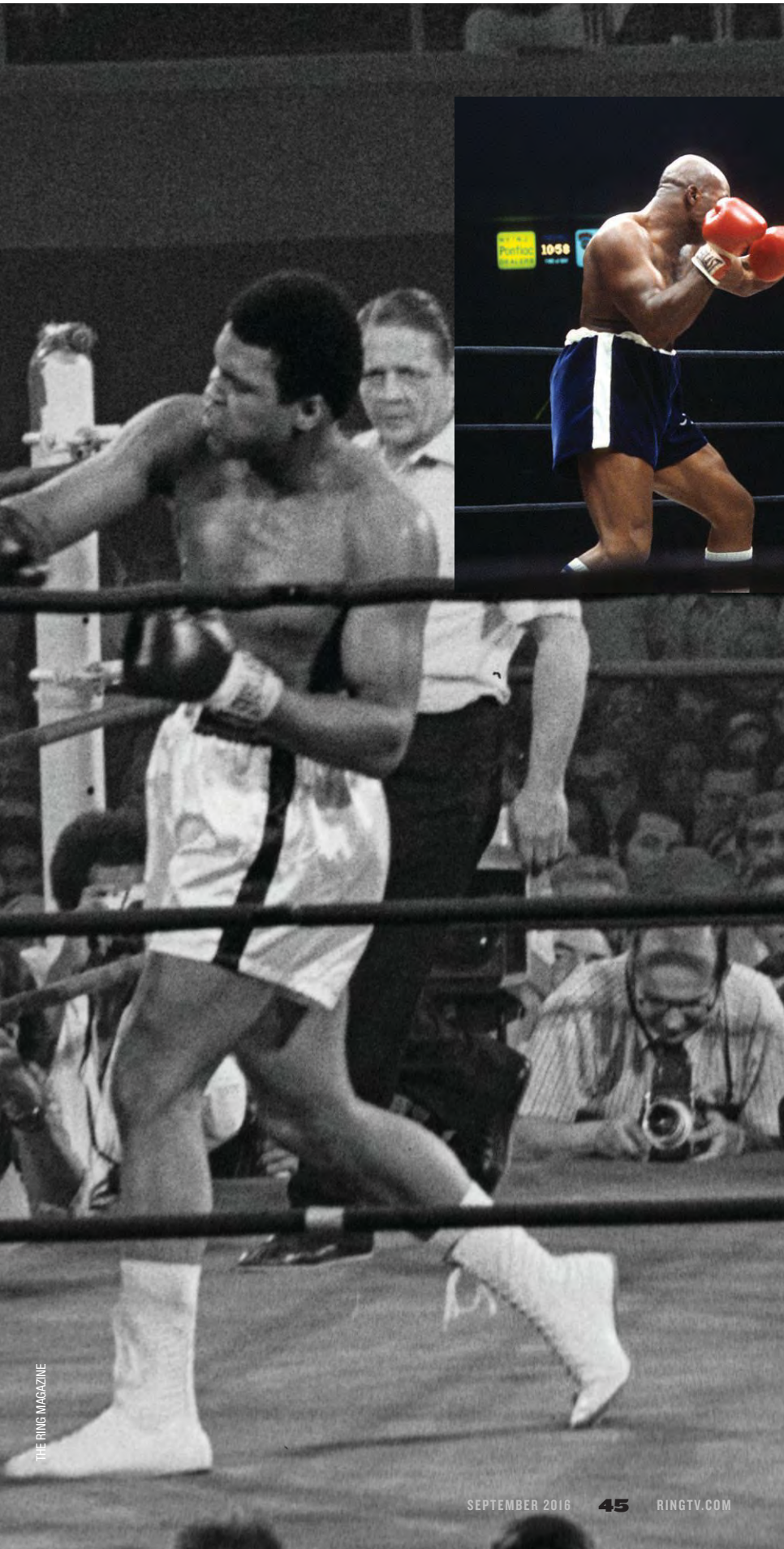
He then became the only man to knock out Oscar Bonavena, the WBA's No. 1 contender, dropping him three times in the 15th round to put himself in position to challenge his old friend and lifelong nemesis,

'His speed wasn't what it had been but we found he had other things.'

– Teddy Atlas, on the second part of Ali's career

Jerry Quarry (left) was a good heavyweight but lost twice to Ali.

Ali wasn't at his best against Jimmy Young but emerged victorious.



Some feared for Ali but he was able to handle Earnie Shavers (left).

Frazier, for the first time. That fight was considered the match of the century because it came heavy with social issues, WITH poor Frazier unfairly labeled as the representative of the old ways and the Silent Majority that favored the Vietnam War and opposed Ali. But it was the skill and the will of the two fighters on March 8, 1971, that made it one of boxing's most memorable moments.

It was in that fight, which Frazier won by unanimous decision and during which he dropped Ali with a massive left hook in the final round, that it became clear Ali was not the same fighter he'd been before his exile. While still quick by heavyweight standards, he was not so fast anymore that he could not be touched.

The Ali Shuffle was still there but as time wore on the great fistic musician would sometimes hit an off-key note and when that happens in boxing the audience isn't the only one that cringes. So does the fighter, and the pain is not only in his ear. It's often in his brain or his ribcage.

Ali the Boxer had to reinvent himself and he did that so effectively he became even more popular and

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twice more a heavyweight champion. But now it was as much his ability and willingness to take punishment while still being able to dish it out that set him apart.

"His speed wasn't what it had been but we found he had other things," veteran trainer and ESPN analyst Teddy Atlas explained. "He had intelligence. He had grit. And he had that chin. He always had those things but we never knew that the first time because no one tested them. When they did, he passed the tests and remained great. Different but still a great fighter."

Ali's jaw was broken in a split-decision loss to Ken Norton two years after the first Frazier fight but he went the distance despite the pain and defeated him in an immediate rematch and again three years later. Some will debate that Norton won two of those fights but the larger fact was it was now a slower, more resolute Ali who was doing the boxing and still finding ways to win.

A perfect example of the difference was the Rumble in the Jungle, when he first out-thought and then out-fought the relentless and seemingly unbeatable George Foreman. He had done the same to Liston, who was as feared in his time as Foreman was in 1974, but that time it was with blinding foot speed Liston could not catch up with. This time Ali did it not with speed and agility, as he most surely would have done 10 years earlier, but rather with quickness of mind and hand, the resilience of his spirit and the stoutness of his chin.

That Ali took every blow Foreman could muster, mostly by lying on the ropes and absorbing them like a sponge in the sweltering heat of the pre-dawn hours in Zaire. He wore young Foreman down not with the movement that was now mostly gone but with his will until a 25-year-old champion seen as invincible became an empty vessel who could barely raise his arms.

Then Ali the vicious closer went

ALI'S GREATEST HITS

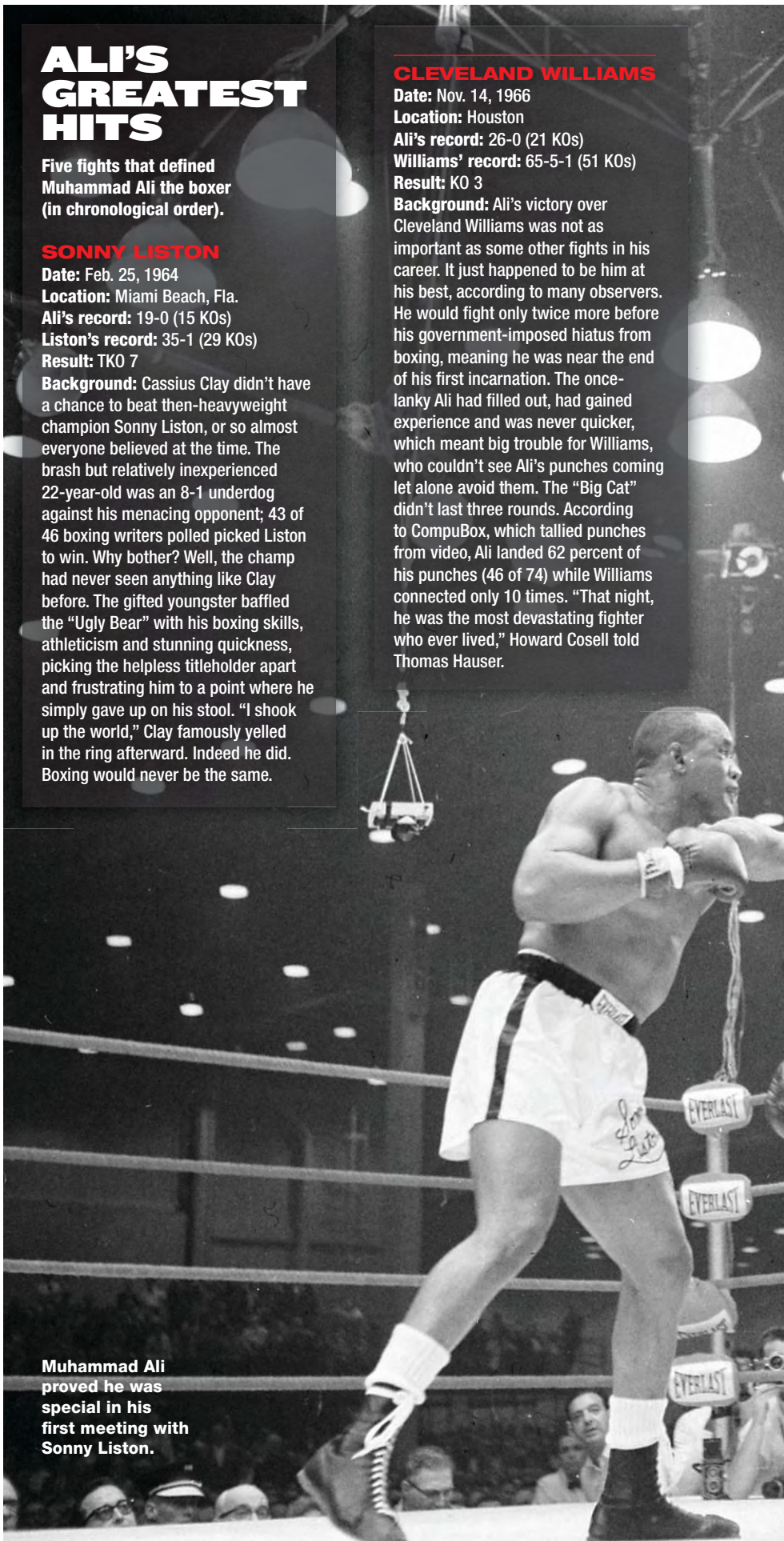
Five fights that defined Muhammad Ali the boxer (in chronological order).

SONNY LISTON

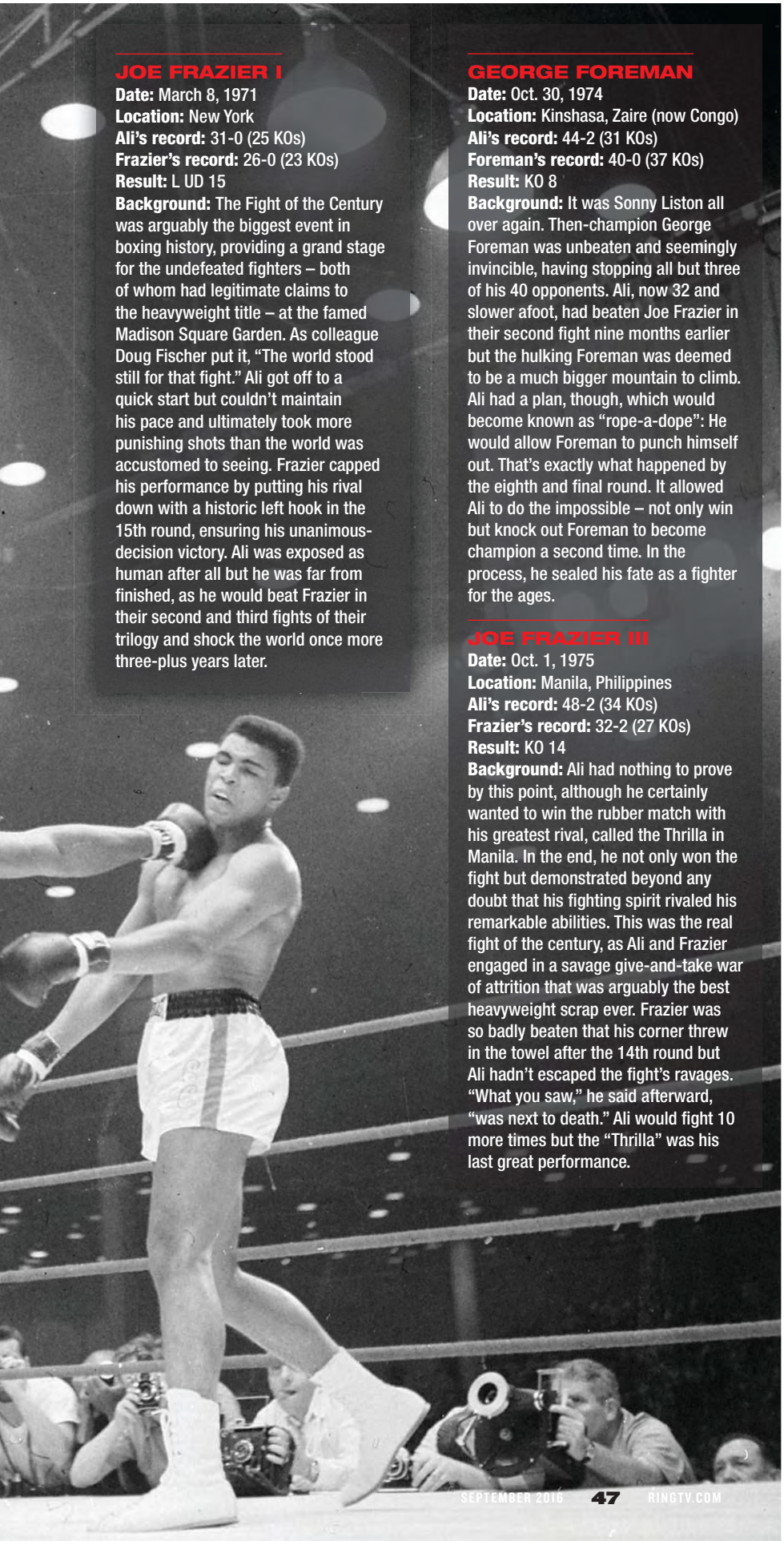
Date: Feb. 25, 1964
Location: Miami Beach, Fla.
Ali's record: 19-0 (15 KOs)
Liston's record: 35-1 (29 KOs)
Result: TKO 7
Background: Cassius Clay didn't have a chance to beat then-heavyweight champion Sonny Liston, or so almost everyone believed at the time. The brash but relatively inexperienced 22-year-old was an 8-1 underdog against his menacing opponent; 43 of 46 boxing writers polled picked Liston to win. Why bother? Well, the champ had never seen anything like Clay before. The gifted youngster baffled the "Ugly Bear" with his boxing skills, athleticism and stunning quickness, picking the helpless titleholder apart and frustrating him to a point where he simply gave up on his stool. "I shook up the world," Clay famously yelled in the ring afterward. Indeed he did. Boxing would never be the same.

CLEVELAND WILLIAMS

Date: Nov. 14, 1966
Location: Houston
Ali's record: 26-0 (21 KOs)
Williams' record: 65-5-1 (51 KOs)
Result: KO 3
Background: Ali's victory over Cleveland Williams was not as important as some other fights in his career. It just happened to be him at his best, according to many observers. He would fight only twice more before his government-imposed hiatus from boxing, meaning he was near the end of his first incarnation. The once-lanky Ali had filled out, had gained experience and was never quicker, which meant big trouble for Williams, who couldn't see Ali's punches coming let alone avoid them. The "Big Cat" didn't last three rounds. According to CompuBox, which tallied punches from video, Ali landed 62 percent of his punches (46 of 74) while Williams connected only 10 times. "That night, he was the most devastating fighter who ever lived," Howard Cosell told Thomas Hauser.



Muhammad Ali proved he was special in his first meeting with Sonny Liston.



JOE FRAZIER I

Date: March 8, 1971
Location: New York
Ali's record: 31-0 (25 KOs)
Frazier's record: 26-0 (23 KOs)
Result: L UD 15
Background: The Fight of the Century was arguably the biggest event in boxing history, providing a grand stage for the undefeated fighters – both of whom had legitimate claims to the heavyweight title – at the famed Madison Square Garden. As colleague Doug Fischer put it, "The world stood still for that fight." Ali got off to a quick start but couldn't maintain his pace and ultimately took more punishing shots than the world was accustomed to seeing. Frazier capped his performance by putting his rival down with a historic left hook in the 15th round, ensuring his unanimous-decision victory. Ali was exposed as human after all but he was far from finished, as he would beat Frazier in their second and third fights of their trilogy and shock the world once more three-plus years later.

GEORGE FOREMAN

Date: Oct. 30, 1974
Location: Kinshasa, Zaire (now Congo)
Ali's record: 44-2 (31 KOs)
Foreman's record: 40-0 (37 KOs)
Result: KO 8
Background: It was Sonny Liston all over again. Then-champion George Foreman was unbeaten and seemingly invincible, having stopping all but three of his 40 opponents. Ali, now 32 and slower afoot, had beaten Joe Frazier in their second fight nine months earlier but the hulking Foreman was deemed to be a much bigger mountain to climb. Ali had a plan, though, which would become known as "rope-a-dope": He would allow Foreman to punch himself out. That's exactly what happened by the eighth and final round. It allowed Ali to do the impossible – not only win but knock out Foreman to become champion a second time. In the process, he sealed his fate as a fighter for the ages.

JOE FRAZIER III

Date: Oct. 1, 1975
Location: Manila, Philippines
Ali's record: 48-2 (34 KOs)
Frazier's record: 32-2 (27 KOs)
Result: KO 14
Background: Ali had nothing to prove by this point, although he certainly wanted to win the rubber match with his greatest rival, called the Thrilla in Manila. In the end, he not only won the fight but demonstrated beyond any doubt that his fighting spirit rivaled his remarkable abilities. This was the real fight of the century, as Ali and Frazier engaged in a savage give-and-take war of attrition that was arguably the best heavyweight scrap ever. Frazier was so badly beaten that his corner threw in the towel after the 14th round but Ali hadn't escaped the fight's ravages. "What you saw," he said afterward, "was next to death." Ali would fight 10 more times but the "Thrilla" was his last great performance.

to work like a symphony conductor, taking Foreman apart with stinging jabs and lead right hands amateurs should not be hit by until he finally sent him to the floor with a brilliant combination.

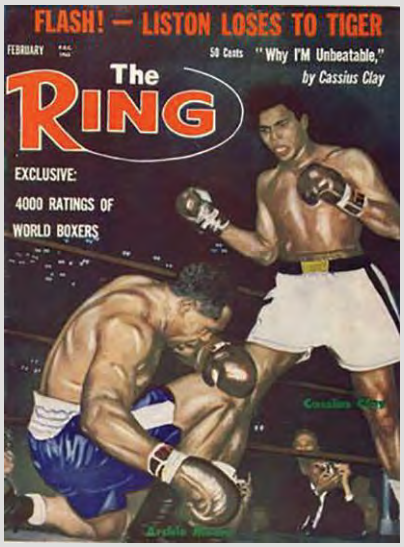
Sweat flew into the air as punches snapped Foreman's head back. When he began to fall, he was vulnerable to one last locked-and-loaded right to his face but Ali chose not to throw it. It was a note he did not need to play and so he held back. The song was over. A tune no one had expected had been heard and it was beautiful music but the kind only a virtuoso of the ring could deliver.

That was the real genius of Muhammad Ali – what he did in the ring. His other accomplishments were more significant and more lasting, of course. They affected the world and the larger society in ways no boxing victory could. But it was his transcendent boxing skill that made all the rest possible. They should be fully remembered too.

He called himself "the greatest of all times" and that can always be debated. Advocates for Sugar Ray Robinson are many. A case can be made for Henry Armstrong, who held three titles in three legitimate weight classes simultaneously and wasn't called "Homicide Hank" for nothing. If you come from a different time you may argue for Sugar Ray Leonard or Joe Louis. But one thing is clear: There has never been a heavyweight who could do the things the first Muhammad Ali did and not many who could have accomplished what the second did either.

Was he, purely as a fighter, the GOAT? Was he even the best heavyweight ever? Debate that if you like but Joe Louis is the only one truly in the heavyweight conversation with Ali and whatever list of boxers Ali is on doesn't have many names on it. In the end, that is what allowed him to become all he became to so many. Boxing opened the door. Ali did the rest.

'I'M UNBEATABLE' ...



A COLUMN WRITTEN BY 21-YEAR-OLD **CASSIUS CLAY** IN 1963 SEEMS PROPHETIC TODAY

By **Cassius Clay (heavyweight contender)** • As told to **Nat Loubet**

Editor's note: Cassius Clay (later Muhammad Ali) wrote the following column for the February 1963 issue of THE RING Magazine. He was still more than a year away from fighting Sonny Liston for the heavyweight championship.

I like to fool around. I like to josh and needle, play practical jokes. But underneath all of that lies a really serious vein.

When I tell you that I am going to be the heavyweight champion of the world I am not joking.

I have confidence, and behind it, the ambition, punch and skill with which to make my prediction come true.

Meanwhile a lot of fight people who have been hiding in the woodwork have come out to grab whatever publicity they can get out of whatever association with me they can set up in the newspapers.

There is Eddie Machen, for one. He invites me to take him on and name the round.

Then there is Cleveland Williams, another Liston victim, whose manager says he will pay me $1,000 for every round I could stay with this man. He couldn't come out for the second.

Let a fighter achieve a certain amount of position and those who have been around for years making futile motions dash out to steal pieces of the limelight.

Billy Daniels also has had something to say, and I have told my manager, Bill Faversham, to let me take care of Williams and Daniels in one night. This also is not comedy.

Bill tells me that between now and September I will have three more fights. He says he is confident that with this extra preparation I could take Liston. I have the greatest respect for Faversham's opinions and in his ability to make them stand up.

CLAY CALLS HIMSELF ONLY LISTON OPPONENT

There is a lot of conversation about me and Liston. No wonder. Who else stands out for a serious shot at Sonny?

After Liston's case of homicide against Patterson, I felt I could demolish Floyd even faster than Sonny did the job, and he was timed in 2 minutes 6 seconds.

Patterson looked terrible. He gave the impression that he had died in training camp and had had no sleep for many nights. Floyd appeared to be suffering from paralysis. He played right into Liston's hands.

Where was Patterson's speed? Where were his plans of attack and defense? Where was his experience? He made Sonny look like the greatest fighter in the history of the ring. Now the reporters write about Liston as the Monster, the Great Unbeatable. That's plain junk.

I know how to beat the slow moving flatfooted Liston. I am convinced that a fighter with speed, with a punch and guts, and the knowledge how to use both of these assets, can beat Liston.

I would make Liston think he was fighting ten guys. I would have him so dizzy he would think he was on a carousel.

Anyone who says I could not handle Liston is not with it. I would jab and hook him silly and move around him.

Angelo Dundee, my trainer, keeps telling me to curb my tongue. He is a quiet man by nature and anybody who talks up, with confidence, impresses him as a kook.

Well, I say only what I believe. You will note that so far I have made good on my predictions. Like stopping Archie Moore in four heats. I called the round. I will call it in a Liston fight.

I don't dig all this talk about me being brash. When I make a prediction I am not looking in a crystal ball. I am analyzing things rationally.

Some of my critics faulted me for saying I would take Donnie Fleeman in four and it took me seven. Well, that was a plain case of miscalculation. I set a fast pace and wear them down before I begin setting myself for my punches.

Donnie didn't wear out as fast as I figured he would.

"WHO LISTENS TO A WHISPER?" CLAY ASKS

Angelo and I always set up a plan for a fight, and so far we have done pretty well.

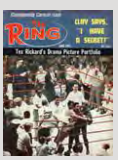
Some people figure I am too loud. Well, I may be that. But who listens to a whisper? Boxing is badly in need of colorful fighters who can back up their mouths with their fists.

This type of fighter used to be a tremendous force in the old ballyhoo. The promoters seem to have lost the ballyhoo knack. I want to revive it – of course, with the ability to make my claims and predictions to stand up.

I want to ask some of the few boxing writers who have been a little harsh toward me – which do they prefer, the drab or the interesting?

I figure that I am a Man of Destiny. I felt that way when I won the Olympic light heavyweight title in 1960, and I have that feeling now more than ever. I believe that I am invincible. Yes, I feel that way. On the level.

Only once in the boxing experience have I been low. That was in the first round against Sonny Banks. Things failed to go right. I said,



"Now, Cassius, don't panic. Be calm. Just keep fighting like you were. Things happen."

That was a very important fight for me. For one thing, I found out I could take a punch and come back strong.

After I got up, I moved fast, stuck him with my left and after a while annihilated him.

Now don't expect me to be able to spell that word "annihilate." I am not trying to win a spelling contest. If anybody ever annihilated me I would kiss his feet and tell the world that he was the greatest. However, the way I size myself up, nobody is going to annihilate me.

Honest, man, I ain't a fool. If I ever did get annihilated I would have to leave the good old USA. But the main idea is to keep people interested in Cassius Clay.

YOU'VE GOT TO BE FIRST, CASSIUS INSISTS

Fighting is a tough business. The field is restricted. To be second, third, fourth, in a division is no good. To tin can around the country just for paydays and muffins is not my idea of living.

If you are a fighter or a carpenter, be the best fighter or carpenter. Don't accept anything less and don't expect the public to take less from you.

Recently, a stranger walked up to me and said, "Are you Cassius Clay, the fighter?" I assured him I was Cassius.

He said, "You talk too much. What you need is a good beating."

I said, "Mister, you go to my next fight and pray that the other guy gives me that beating."

I am amused by Liston' s remarks concerning my statements that I would beat him. One paper reported that he said, "Someday some guy will kill that gas bag." Was he referring to me as a gas bag? Who was the real gas bag in that situation?

Now, that guy Johansson. Somebody asks him if he would like to fight me and he says he would not embarrass himself fighting a loudmouth like me. He added that it would take him one round to handle me.

Johansson need not be embarrassed. If I fought him he would on the floor in the first round.

I am told that I should develop my modesty. Why? What good can modesty do me? How much can I sell modesty for? How is it sold? By the quart or the pound?

There is too much modesty in the fight game. If people come to see me just to laugh if I should hit the deck – well they come to see me. They are interested. They don't show up if they don't give a damn about Cassius Clay.

I want to say this, and make it strong. I have heard the modest fighters booed.

WHY DO SO MANY GOOD ONES SNUB CLAY?

There is too much of that modesty and loudmouth talk. It hides the real issue. Am I a fighter with a future? Or am I a mere braggart who cannot back up his interviews?

Do the writers interview me and write columns and columns about me because they don't believe in me? Bunk, plain bunk. They know that Cassius Clay, of Louisville, Olympic champion, is headed for the top and they don't want to get lost in the shuffle.

If I am just talk, why do so many good fighters refuse to meet me?

If I am nothing why does Johansson refuse $100,000 to fight me?

If I am nothing, why does Patterson ignore me? He is a much over-rated fighter. If he fought me he never would get into a second fight with Liston.

Liston? A hard puncher. They say, "Cassius, you stay away from Liston for a couple of years and then he and you both will be ripe for the fight, with you having a good chance."

That is great stand-around thinking. You don't win titles that way and you don't make money, either.

I am moving toward my twenty-first birthday. I fight at 200 pounds. I am fast and capable. One thing, nobody had the guts to call me a clown fighter like Hurricane Jackson was.

I have a good left jab. It is going to get better. I have stamina. I have a left hook. I can scissor that right hand of mine.

The critics say, "Cassius, you stand up straight too much. You back into the ropes too much."

And I say, "If I do those things, they have a purpose, and I always want to be myself, not a copy, not somebody's second duplicate. You have to realize that my speed enables me to overcome certain things which you may call faults.

OLDER EXPERTS SEE ANOTHER BILLY CONN

Some of the fight writers tell me that in form I resemble Billy Conn, and they add that if he had had my weight he would have beaten Joe Louis.

I fool people about my weight. They figure I come in at 175-180. But I am solidly built and with that, I remind you again, fast on my feet.

Conn, they say, also had a certain amount of brashness about him. He wasn't afraid to speak out.

They tell me, "Boxing never before had a guy like you. Either you have a lot of stuff with which to back this up or you are foolhardy."

I assure the writers and the fans – and the editors of The Ring Magazine – that if there is one thing I am not, it is foolhardy.

I like to read the things writers say about me. They sometimes have me boasting that I am as great a fighter as I will ever be, or hope to be.

That is not the truth. I am only two years away from the Olympics. But if, in this short time, I have made the progress which all the experts admit I have made, is it foolhardy of me to believe that I will be greater in still another year?

Do they take me for a dummy? Do they believe that I learn nothing from every start in the ring?

It is hard to impress on some of the experts the fact that instead of being on the skids, as so many of them say, boxing is very much on the rise.

I am only 21. But it seems to me that we have more great fighters than ever before, and it also strikes me that not all of the superlatives of the ring came in the long ago.

STRATEGY AGAINST SONNY ONE SUBJECT BARRED

This boy Tiger is a great fighter and so is Griffith. From the lower classifications right up to Cassius Clay, the ring is loaded with class. Time and boxing refuse to stand still.

Concerning a Liston fight, some of the sports writers ask me, "How do you figure to fight this man? The real inside story, not merely stuff about speed and moving around."

Angelo and I have talked about this a lot. But this is one thing I don't care to discuss at this time.

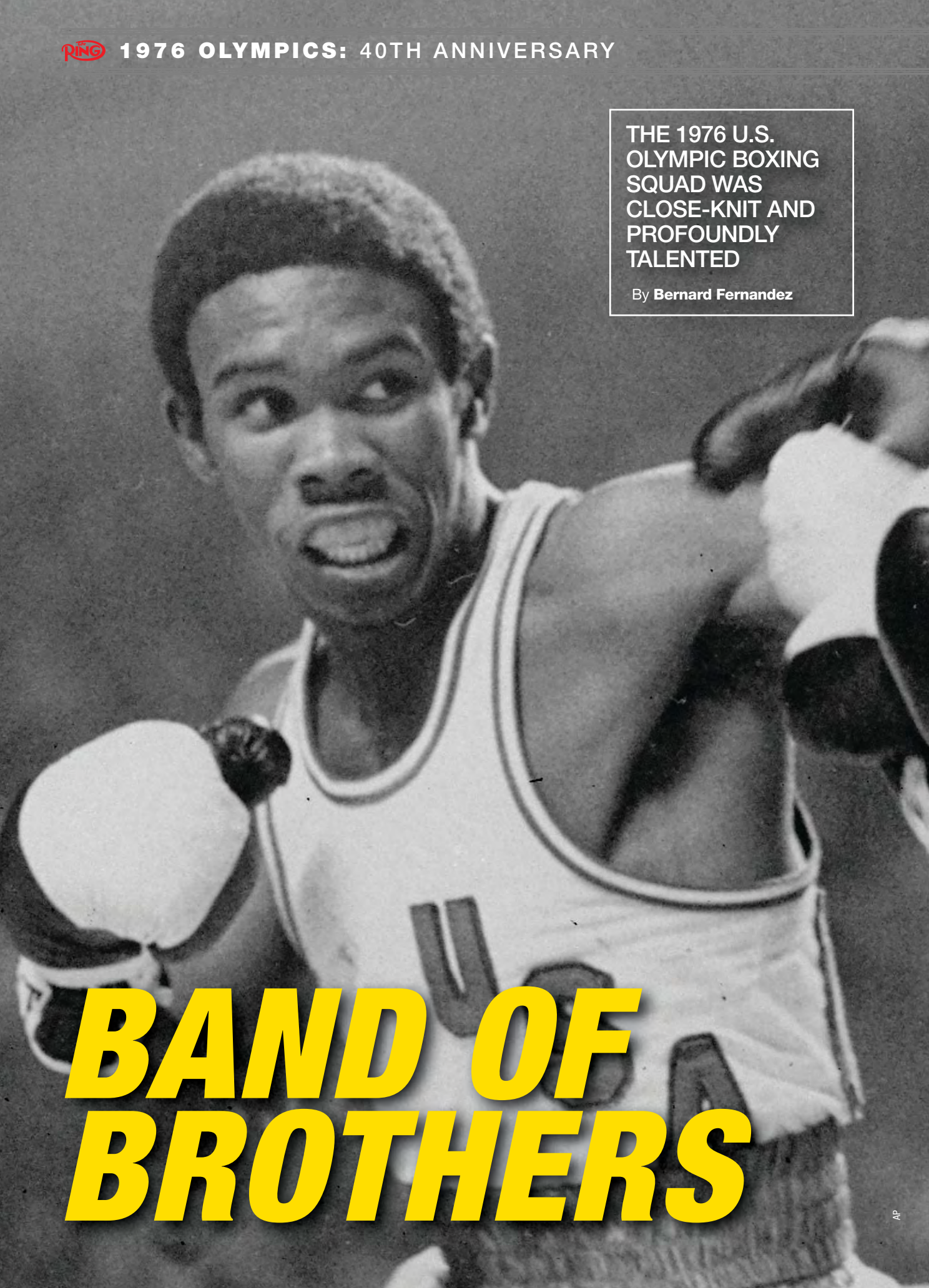
Let me tip you to one thing. Sonny Liston's age. He says he is 28. Even if you accept that figure – and I don't – he is seven years older than me.

In another year he still will be seven years older and at his count, 29. Two years from now I still will have seven years, at least, on him and he will be at least 30.

I don't want to spill everything in this story. I have been told that I will get a chance to do another article in six or seven months. Let's see what new material I will have.

One thing I would like to do. I would like to write about the boyhood of Cassius Clay, about his family, about his hopes and ambitions. That material would come in handy when it came time to write the full story of Cassius Clay, World Champion. RING

These are only a handful of the many RING covers graced by Ali.



THE 1976 U.S. OLYMPIC BOXING SQUAD WAS CLOSE-KNIT AND PROFOUNDLY TALENTED

By **Bernard Fernandez**

BAND OF BROTHERS

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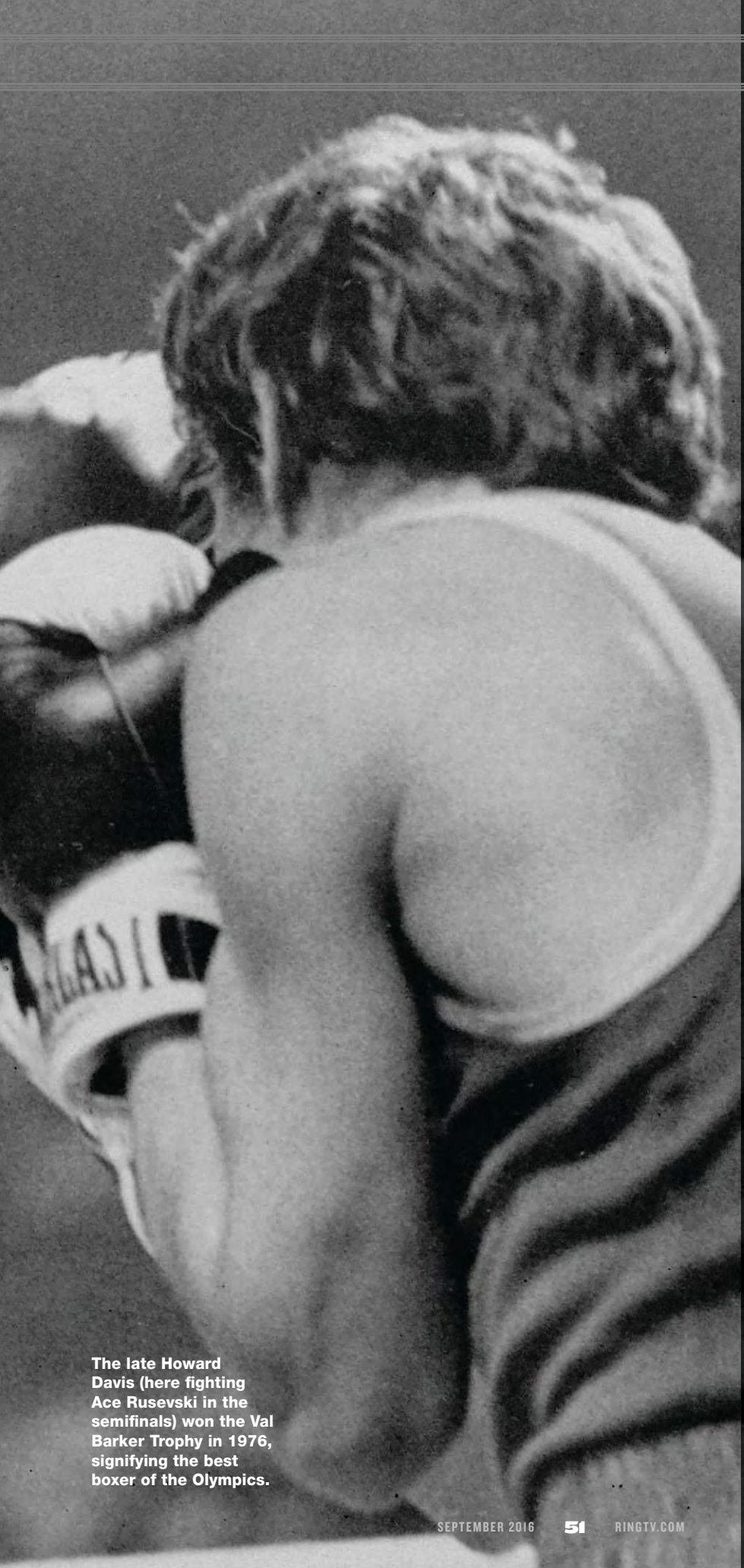


The late Howard Davis (here fighting Ace Rusevski in the semifinals) won the Val Barker Trophy in 1976, signifying the best boxer of the Olympics.

For more than a few members of the 1976 United States Olympic boxing team, certain moments from their date with destiny in Montreal have been forever crystallized in memory, blurring the line that separates what was then from what is now. Some are grandfathers, with graying hair or almost none at all. All are edging ever closer to senior-citizen status. Still, when they close their eyes and allow themselves the luxury of personal and collective reminiscence, 40 years melt away as readily as the last patches of spring snow on a warm day.

The surviving members of that band of brothers, widely hailed as the greatest team ever to represent the U.S. in Olympic competition, were brought together from June 9 through 12 for a reunion during induction weekend at the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York. It was for the most part a happy occasion, a chance for old friends to reconnect and bask in the adoration of fans who cherish what they did when they were fresh-faced kids embarking on the shared adventure of a lifetime. But it was also a time for somberness, to commemorate the life of another of their diminishing number, the late Howard Davis Jr., who was 59 when he passed away after losing a heroic battle with cancer on Dec. 30, 2015.

Davis was one of five Americans (along with Sugar Ray Leonard, Leon Spinks, Michael Spinks and Leo Randolph) to win a gold medal in 1976 and he received the Val Barker Award as the Most Outstanding Boxer, perhaps as much for his inspirational presence as for his exemplary performance in the ring. Midway through the tournament, Davis received word that his 37-year-old mother, Catherine, had died suddenly of a heart attack, just days before her 20-year-old son was to advance to the championship bout in

the 132-pound weight class. Davis' teammates and coaches, all of whom held him in the highest esteem, agreed they would support whatever decision he made. Grief-stricken, he considered leaving the Olympic Village immediately and returning home before he decided that the most fitting way to honor his mother's memory would be to win the gold medal, which he dedicated to her. By finishing what he had started under the most trying of circumstances, Davis became even more the emotional heart of a close-knit group whose sense of unity, of purpose, already was becoming the stuff of legend.

There is nothing as absolute as death to make the living appreciate what they have.

"It reminds you of how fragile life is," Sugar Ray Leonard, 60, the breakout star of that Spirit of '76 Olympic team, said of the sense of loss he felt upon learning of Davis' death. "It's a warning to all of us to savor those special moments. Howard – I called him 'John-John' – was a dear, dear friend of mine. You know, he called me a few days before he passed. We talked and he never said 'woe is me' or anything like that. He kept saying, 'Ray, I'm going to beat this thing.' I said, 'I know, Howard, I know. I'm with you, man.'

"Even though I knew how sick he was, I wanted to believe that somehow he would get through it because, well, he was Howard Davis. When I got the call that he had passed, it was like a piece of me had fallen off my heart."

The same sentiments are echoed by Chuck Walker, 59, the U.S. representative in the 156-pound weight class who did not medal but feels just as strongly about his place on that team – and his relationship with Davis – as does Leonard. Now an independent film producer and director in the Houston area, he referenced the March 14, 1980, plane crash in Warsaw, Poland, that claimed the lives of all 87 aboard, including 14 fighters and eight staff members of the

1976 U.S. OLYMPIC BOXING TEAM

LOUIS CURTIS
Division: 106 pounds
Medal: None
Hometown: Washington, D.C.
Current age: 58
Pro record: 15-6-1 (7 KOs)
Comment: Challenged for IBF flyweight title. ... Last fight in 1992.

LEO RANDOLPH
Division: 112 pounds
Medal: Gold
Hometown: Tacoma, Wash.
Current age: 58
Pro record: 17-2 (9 KOs)
Comment: Beat Cuba's Ramon Duvalon 3-2 in final. … Stopped Ricardo Cardona to win WBA junior featherweight title.

CHARLES MOONEY
Division: 119 pounds
Medal: Silver
Hometown: Washington, D.C.
Current age: 65
Pro record: None
Comment: Three-time All-Army and All-Inter-Service champion never turned pro. Spent 22 years in the military and retired as a sergeant first class.

DAVEY ARMSTRONG
Division: 125 pounds
Medal: None
Hometown: Puyallup, Wash.
Current age: 60
Pro record: 24-3 (14 KOs)
Comment: Only member of 1976 Olympic team to have also been on the U.S. squad at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

HOWARD DAVIS JR.
Division: 132 pounds
Medal: Gold
Hometown: Glen Cove, N.Y.
Current age: Died at 59 (2015)
Pro record: 36-6-1 (14 KOs)
Comment: Beat Romania's Simion Cutov 5-0 in final. … Lost both of his world title bouts as a pro, to WBC lightweight champ Edwin Rosario and IBF junior welterweight champ Buddy McGirt.

Gold medalist Sugar Ray Leonard was hit hard by the death of teammate Howard Davis.

AP

RAY LEONARD
Division: 139 pounds
Medal: Gold
Hometown: Palmer Park, Md.
Current age: 60
Pro record: 36-3-1 (25 KOs)
Comment: Won seven world titles in five weight classes as a pro. … Inducted into International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1997.

CLINTON JACKSON
Division: 147 pounds
Medal: None
Hometown: Nashville, Tenn.
Current age: 61
Pro record: 25-7 (17 KOs)
Comment: Serving a life sentence in an Alabama prison for kidnapping.

CHUCK WALKER
Division: 156 pounds
Medal: None
Hometown: Mesa, Ariz.
Current age: 59
Pro record: 9-1-1 (3 KOs)
Comment: 1975 AAU champion. … Bronze medalist at 1975 Pan American Games.

MICHAEL SPINKS
Division: 165 pounds
Medal: Gold
Hometown: St. Louis
Current age: 60 (on July 13)
Pro record: 31-1 (21 KOs)
Comment: Beat USSR's Rufat Riskiyev by RSC-3 in final. … Won world titles at both light heavyweight and heavyweight as a pro. … Inducted into IBHOF in 1994.

LEON SPINKS
Division: 178 pounds
Medal: Gold
Hometown: St. Louis
Current age: 63 (on July 11)
Pro record: 26-17 (14 KOs)
Comment: Beat Cuba's Sixto Soria by RSC-3 in final. … Won WBC/WBA heavyweight championship in only his eighth pro bout, upsetting all-time great Muhammad Ali by a 15-round split decision.

JOHN TATE
Division: Above 178 pounds
Medal: Bronze
Hometown: Knoxville, Tenn.
Current age: died at 43 (1998)
Pro record: 34-3 (23 KOs)
Comment: Died from injuries sustained in the crash of his pickup truck. … Briefly reigned as WBA heavyweight champ.

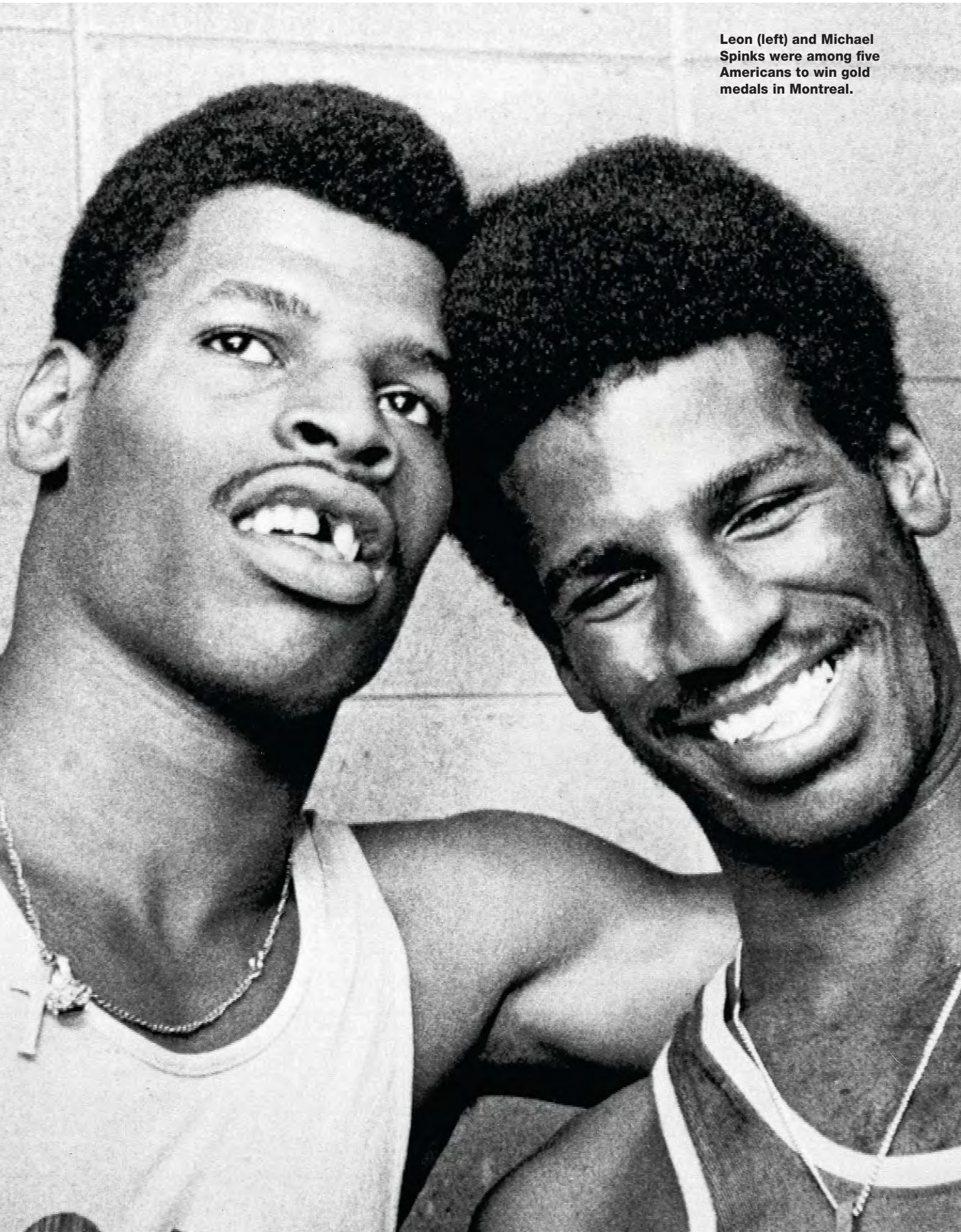
Note: Hometowns refer to residence at the time of the 1976 Olympics.

U.S. boxing team. Among those killed was coach Tom "Sarge" Johnson, an assistant coach on the 1976 Olympic squad. Exactly one week after the tragedy, President Jimmy Carter announced that the U.S. and many of its allies would boycott the Moscow Olympics in protest of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

"I lost 'Sarge' in that crash and I knew several other people with that team," said Walker, the only Caucasian fighter on the 1976 squad who, perhaps not surprisingly, was affectionately dubbed "White Chocolate" by his teammates. "When it happened I received dozens of phone calls from people who hadn't thought of me in a while but were concerned in case there was any chance I might have been on that plane. It kind of brings it home that you never know when your time is coming. Howard's death affected me the same way. Of all the guys on the team – and we were all very close – Howard, Charlie Mooney and I were like the Three Musketeers. We did everything together."

If the gauging of time can be a bit hazy, depending on individual recollection, so can the perceived worth of raw numbers. Although the U.S. boxing team at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics enjoyed unparalleled success – a record haul of 11 medals, including nine golds, in comparison to the seven total medals amassed by the 1976 crew – the '84 squad likely benefited from the absence of Cuba and 11 Soviet Bloc countries, which boycotted that Olympics in response to the American boycott of the Moscow Games four years earlier.

"That was by far the best team the United States has ever produced," Ed Schuyler Jr., the retired boxing writer for The Associated Press who covered both the 1976 and 1984 Olympics, said of the '76 group. "Hands down. It's not even fair to compare that bunch with any other. Leo Randolph beat a Cuban. Leon Spinks beat a Cuban. Sugar Ray



Leon (left) and Michael Spinks were among five Americans to win gold medals in Montreal.

beat a Cuban. I mean, come on. Yeah, there was a boycott by some of the African countries (in '76), but they weren't medal threats in boxing for the most part. The Russians and the East Germans and especially the Cubans were."

Added Jerry Izenberg, the longtime sports columnist for the Newark Star-Ledger and a 2016 inductee into the IBHOF in the Observer Category: "The 1984 team probably got more attention (in the U.S. because of the higher medal count and the fact the Games were staged in America) but you have to remember the Cubans and the Soviet Bloc countries were not there. The Cubans had the best boxing team in the world, without question. The 1976 team faced tougher competition; they went up against the best of the best to accomplish what they did. Were there great fighters on that 1984 team? Sure there were, just as there were on the 1976 team. But it was the '76 team that was put to the ultimate test."

To hear some tell it, that 1976 team was an overachieving collection of underdogs whose frequent trips to the medal stand were no less remarkable than, say, the 1980 U.S. ice hockey squad shocking the supposedly invincible Soviets in Lake Placid, New York, en route to taking wholly unexpected gold. But that clearly is overstating the case.

"Everybody that was anybody was there, all the Eastern Bloc countries and Cuba," recalled Leonard. "We had to go through the toughest competition to wind up doing what we did. I know I had some pretty difficult fights; we all did, really. (Heavyweight) Big John Tate had to fight Teofilo Stevenson, the great Cuban. Howard Davis' mother passed; he was going to go home and not even compete. When I look back, I don't think there was anyone who thought we'd win more than one gold medal and it would be Howard who got it. But guess what? We were all part of the best team ever.

"If I could re-live anything, I would want to re-live that moment when I was on the medal stand. Those Olympics were the best time of my life; I was young and everything seemed so exciting. Even before we went to Montreal, I think, as a group, we had this instinctive feeling something special was about to happen. We really were a team, in the best sense of the word. We cared about one another. We treated each other with respect, honor and love. It's hard to explain how tight and strong the bond between us all became."

Leonard, however, could never be characterized as a scrappy longshot who cashed an Olympic lottery ticket and rode it to superstardom in the pros. ABC-TV sportscaster Howard Cosell had the prescience to identify him as an ongoing story, alerting viewers early and often to the fact that the flashy kid with the megawatt smile from Palmer Park, Maryland, was fighting with a photo of his girlfriend and future wife, Juanita Wilkinson, taped to the sock inside his right shoe. By the time he pitched a 5-0 shutout at Cuba's Andres Aldama in the 139-pound final, Ray Charles Leonard was forever imbedded in his homeland's consciousness as Sugar Ray, American idol.

"Ray Leonard is the greatest amateur I've ever seen in my 38 years in amateur boxing," Rollie Schwartz, the U.S. Olympic team manager, said before the team left for Montreal. "He has the fastest reflexes and the greatest balance – reflexes like Muhammad Ali, balance like Sugar Ray Robinson."

Word of Leonard's incandescent talent spread quickly, as he would find out. "I was in the steamroom where the athletes were housed and then the door opened and this massive individual, this beautiful man, walked in," he said. "It was (future three-time Olympic champion) Teofilo Stevenson. He put this massive hand on my knee and said, 'Leonard, I don't care what anybody else say, you are the best.' I wasn't aware he even he knew who I was."

How good was Leonard in Montreal? He won all five of his bouts by 5-0 margins, none of his opponents winning on the scorecard of even one judge. But as dominant as that was, it was no more so than the spectacular performances turned in by Davis (three 5-0 shutouts, two wins by knockout or stoppage) and Leon Spinks, who also had two KOs and three 5-0 decision wins.

"All the guys were fantastic people but they were also pretty bad boys in the ring," said Michael Spinks, the 165-pound gold medalist and future light heavyweight and heavyweight titlist who, like Leonard, is an inductee into the IBHOF. "All of the guys could really, really fight. It wasn't just the guys who won gold medals. Some of the ones who didn't get a medal were very good too. When it came to fight, we didn't take no prisoners. I'm just giving credit where credit is due."

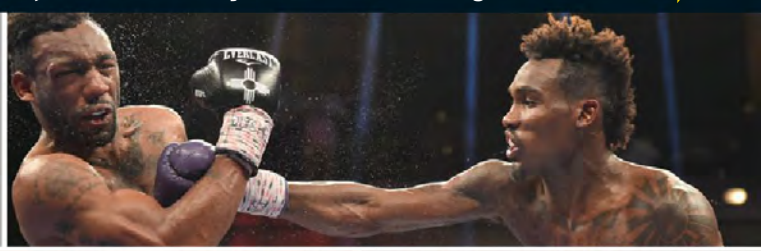
Part of that credit goes to head coach Pat Nappi, a career military man who was a master sergeant when he retired from the Army in 1962 and served as coach for 1976, 1980 and 1984 teams. He and Johnson believed in the we're-all-in-this-together approach, which might not have worked so well had not this particular group of boxers bought in.

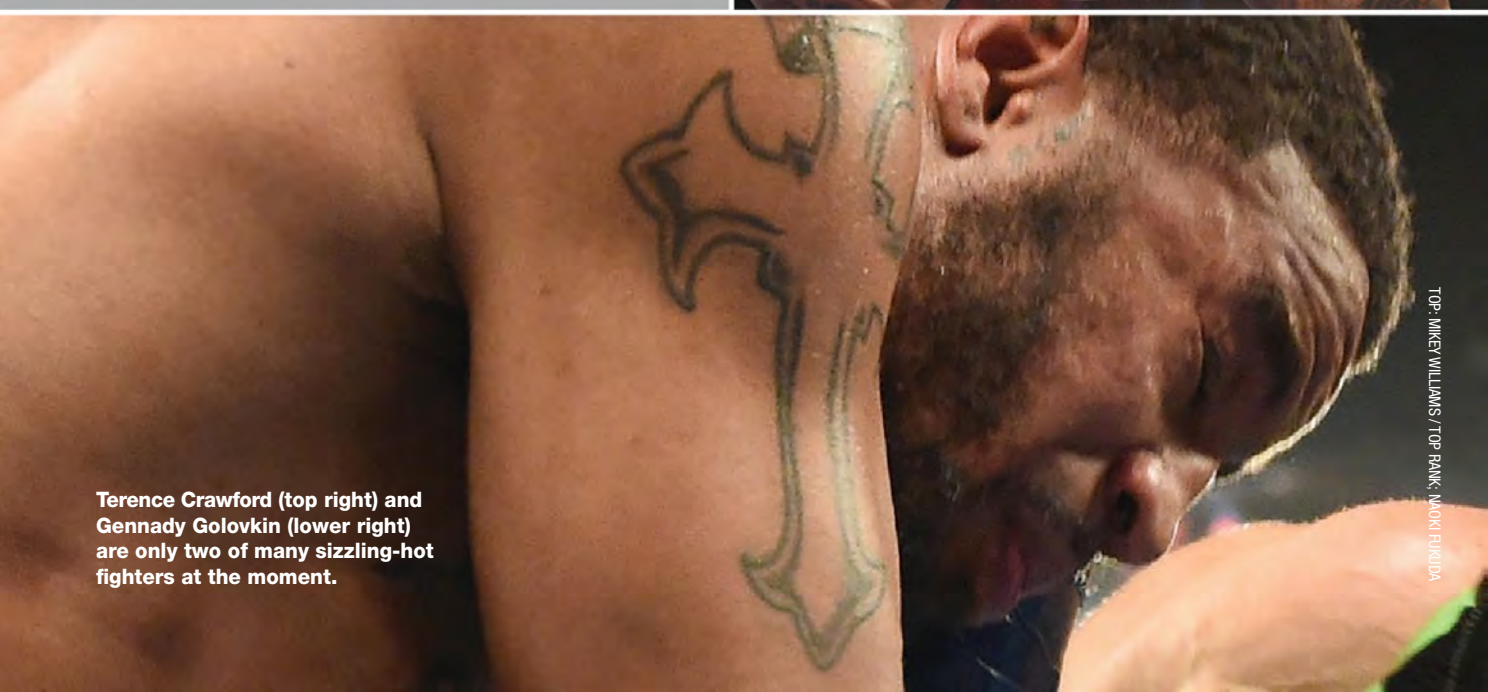
Nappi was 75 when he died in 1993, Johnson was 58 when he perished in that plane crash in 1980, and bronze medalist John Tate was 43 when he passed away from injuries sustained in a one-vehicle crash in 1998. Davis now has joined them in taking the eternal 10-count and his surviving teammates are left to wonder how many more reunions (there also were similar get-togethers in 2001 and 2006) will be as fully attended.

"For me, the 1976 Olympics seem like they just happened because the memories are so pleasant," said Louis Curtis, 58, the 106-pound representative. "But you know what they say: Tomorrow is promised to no one. The memories we have will always tie us together, but nobody lives forever, so we better enjoy it while we can. RING

The RING STATE OF

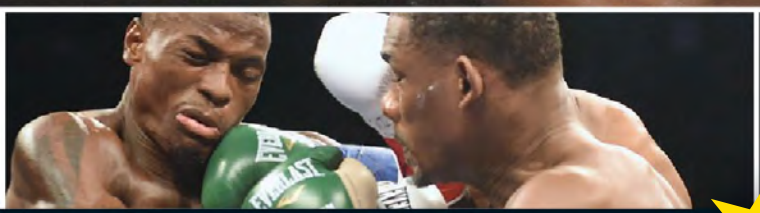
By **David Greisman /** Compiled by **David Greisman, Martin Mulcahey and Anson Wainwright**

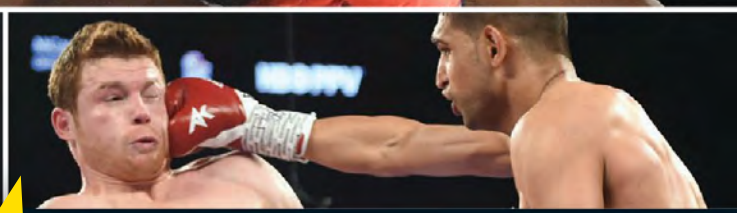




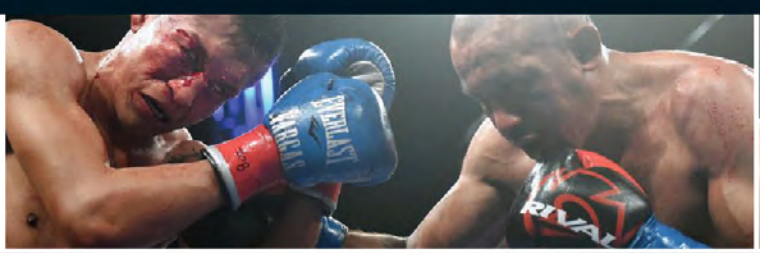
Terence Crawford (top right) and Gennady Golovkin (lower right) are only two of many sizzling-hot fighters at the moment.

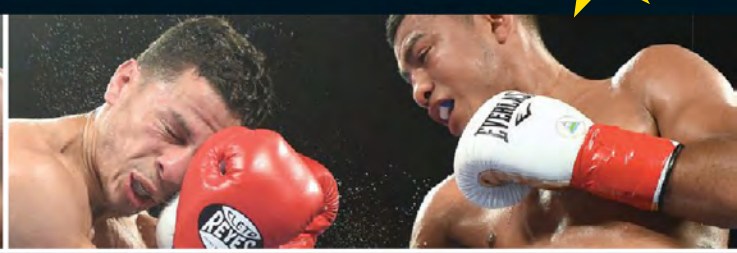
TOP: MIKEY WILLIAMS / TOP RANK; NAOKI FUKUDA





THE GAME





So much can change in the course of a year. So little can change too. Those two themes became evident while reviewing where boxing's 17 divisions were when last we checked in on them for our annual State of the Game and researching what their storylines are now and who makes up their main characters and supporting cast.

Some divisions have seen remarkable upheaval. The sport has in general. Retirements, losses and other moves have gutted the list of longest-reigning titleholders, leaving only one name that was on the Top 10 a year ago. Then there are the divisions that are stuck in the same rut with nowhere good to go, while others are caught up in the same obstacles keeping them from reaching a desired destination.

We turn, as usual, to our team of boxing experts — David Greisman, Martin Mulcahey and Anson Wainwright — to examine and explain what's going on and what's to come.

Note: State of the Game was compiled through fights of June 5. »

Will Tyson Fury retain the RING belt in his rematch with Wladimir Klitschko?

A year ago, the longest-reigning titleholder in the heavyweight division also was the longest-reigning titleholder in all of boxing. Then Wladimir Klitschko lost a surprising decision to Tyson Fury last November, ending a reign that started way back in April 2006 and included 18 successful defenses over a rarely watchable nine years, seven months and six days. Not only does that mean there's a new RING champion in Fury — for now — but it coincides with a theme of new life in the heavyweight division, with plenty of opportunity amid this new uncertainty as we wait to see who, if anyone, will be as dominant as Klitschko was.

THE STARS

Fury and Klitschko have their rematch scheduled for July 9 in Manchester, which will show how much Klitschko has left and, in turn, how much Fury truly has to offer. Meanwhile, Anthony Joshua captured a world title in April with an easy victory over Charles Martin in London and was due to make his first defense in late June against undefeated yet raw prospect Dominic Breazeale. Deontay Wilder had been scheduled to take on mandatory challenger Alexander Povetkin in Moscow in May but Povetkin tested positive for a performance enhancing drug and the fight was canceled. Wilder will instead be allowed to defend against Chris Arreola on July 16.

THE DEPTH

There are much better contenders than Breazeale waiting for their own shots. Luis Ortiz took out Bryant Jennings and Tony Thompson with a refreshing mix of power and technique. Joseph Parker stepped up in May against former title challenger Carlos Takam and won a unanimous decision. David Haye returned from an extended layoff, picking up wins in January and May. He is expected to face Shannon Briggs in September.

BEST PUNCHER
DEONTAY WILDER

BEST BOXER
WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO

MOST PROTECTED
DAVID HAYE

IS HE STILL AROUND?
GUILLERMO JONES

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
TYSON FURY VS. DEONTAY WILDER

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
LUIS ORTIZ

MOST FUN TO WATCH
ANTHONY JOSHUA

ON THE WAY UP
JOSEPH PARKER

ON THE WAY DOWN
BRYANT JENNINGS

Lucas Browne came off the canvas to stop Ruslan Chagaev but his future is cloudy after he was suspended for testing positive for a banned substance. They are joined by an assortment of familiar names who fell short before reaching the top or who are past their primes and hanging around out of some mix of optimism and desperation.

THE FUTURE

As always, network affiliations may dictate matchmaking. Ortiz is with HBO, which may put him in line to face the Fury-Klitschko rematch winner. Joshua has signed a deal with Showtime. Although his promoter has mentioned Fury as a future possibility, Joshua may also be on a course to meeting Wilder or selling out a stadium in the United Kingdom for a collision with Haye. As for the current crop of prospects, they don't yet come close to resembling Joshua and Parker, whom we spotlighted here last year. Don't expect big things from Trevor Bryan, Andy Ruiz or Gerald Washington, among others. ★

TITLEHOLDERS BY COUNTRY

Fifty-nine fighters – from 18 countries – hold major world titles.

The United Kingdom claims the top spot for perhaps the first time ever. The U.K. is followed by three upper-tier mainstays in the United States, Mexico and Japan.

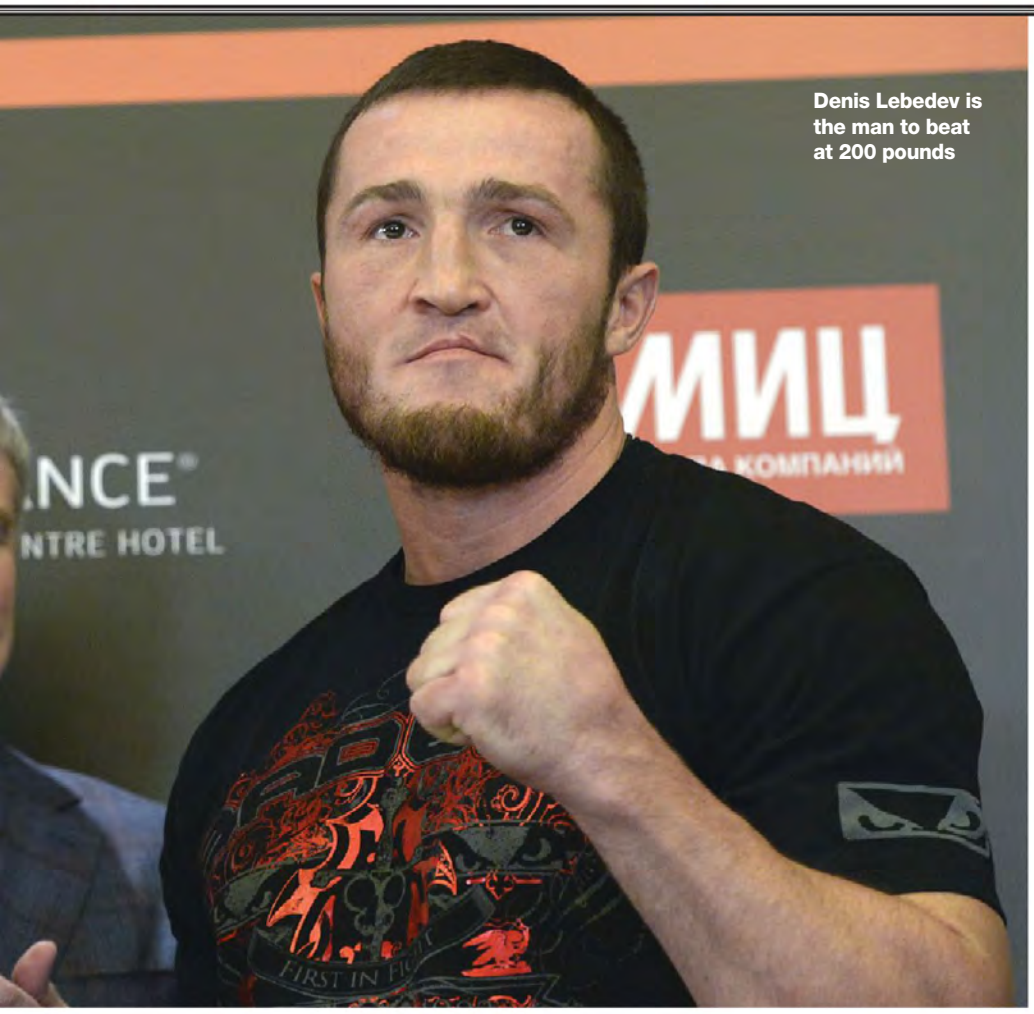
Four nations are tied for fifth place: Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Russia

Two countries enter the list this year: Panama (junior lightweight Jezreel Corrales) and Poland (cruiserweight Krzysztof Głowacki).

Six countries from last year's list, meanwhile, are now off as their fighters lost belts: Argentina (featherweight Jesus Cuellar was demoted to a secondary title); Armenia (super middleweight Arthur Abraham); Colombia (lightweight Darleys Perez); Ireland (middleweight Andy Lee); South Africa (strawweight Hekkie Budler); and Venezuela (Jorge Linares, who was stripped).

Note: This list is through fights of June 5 and includes RING champions and IBF, WBA, WBC and WBO titleholders. It doesn't include "interim" titleholders or "regular" WBA titleholders in divisions where there is also a "super" titleholder.

UNITED KINGDOM	12
UNITED STATES	9
MEXICO	8
JAPAN	5
CUBA	3
PHILIPPINES	3
PUERTO RICO	3
RUSSIA	3
NICARAGUA	2
THAILAND	2
UKRAINE	2
CANADA	1
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1
GERMANY	1
KAZAKHSTAN	1
PANAMA	1
POLAND	1
SWEDEN	1



Denis Lebedev is the man to beat at 200 pounds

There is no longer a RING champion here, with Yoan Pablo Hernandez retiring after injuries derailed his career. There is no longtime titleholder, as Marco Huck failed to win a fight that would've broken a division record for successful defenses. Grigory Drozd defended the title he took from mainstay Krzysztof Wlodarczyk only once before being stripped because of an injury that has kept him out of the ring. And while all of this sounds like bad news, the great news about the cruiserweight division is that it hasn't otherwise missed a beat. There's been great action, a new standard-bearer, good fighters, qualified contenders and at least a few veterans who aren't yet ready to leave until they're forcefully shown the door.

THE STARS

Denis Lebedev has come a long way from his days of facing the over-the-hill Roy Jones and James Toney. He now has two belts and is the man to beat at 200, coming off a unification domination of Victor Emilio Ramirez in May that followed a decision over Youri Kalenga and a stoppage of Lateef Kayode last year. His only losses were a split decision to Huck in 2010 and a loss in a brutal war to Guillermo Jones in 2013, after which Jones tested positive for a banned substance. Another titleholder is Krzysztof Glowacki, who came from off the canvas to stop Huck last year, topped Steve Cunningham in April and will next face an Olympic gold medalist and highly touted pro, Oleksandr Usyk.

THE DEPTH

Tony Bellew stopped Ilunga Makabu in late May for Drozd's old title. Huck came back from the Glowacki loss by stopping Ola Afolabi in their fourth meeting. Lebedev has a couple of opponents waiting for him: Beibut Shumenov, who outboxed BJ Flores and stopped Junior Wright, and Yunier Dorticos, who survived a war to beat Kalenga in May. Then there are Wlodarczyk, who just came back from the 2014 Drozd loss with wins in March and May; Rakhim Chakhkiev, whose two defeats were to Wlodarczyk in 2013 and Afolabi last year; and Firat Arslan, now 45, is a couple fights removed from his close loss to Hernandez in 2014.

BEST PUNCHER
DENIS LEBEDEV

BEST BOXER
GRIGORY DROZD

MOST PROTECTED
BEIBUT SHUMENOV

IS HE STILL AROUND?
FIRAT ARSLAN

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
DENIS LEBEDEV VS. KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
MAIRIS BREIDIS

MOST FUN TO WATCH
DENIS LEBEDEV

ON THE WAY UP
MURAT GASSIEV

ON THE WAY DOWN
VICTOR EMILIO RAMIREZ

THE FUTURE

Nothing catches the eye like highlight-reel knockouts, which Mairis Breidis and Murat Gassiev have given us. Breidis is in line for a title shot. Gassiev is still young but may not be too far behind. Other prospects include Noel Gevor and Andrew Tabiti. ★

ALEXANDER NEMENOV

Stop holding your breath for a bout between Adonis Stevenson, who has one world title, and Sergey Kovalev, who unified the other three. Stubborn politics still have them defending in a number of mismatches instead. Kovalev at least makes occasional fights that pique our interest, including another that should come before 2016 is over. Stevenson's reign has been particularly disappointing given there still are at least a couple of contenders he not only should face, but can.

BEST PUNCHER
SERGEY KOVALEV

BEST BOXER
ANDRE WARD

MOST PROTECTED
SEAN MONAGHAN

IS HE STILL AROUND?
CHAD DAWSON

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
ADONIS STEVENSON VS. SERGEY KOVALEV

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
ELEIDER ALVAREZ

MOST FUN TO WATCH
EDWIN RODRIGUEZ

ON THE WAY UP
OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK

ON THE WAY DOWN
JEAN PASCAL

THE STARS

Stevenson became the RING champion when he stopped Chad Dawson in one round in 2013. It's been diminishing returns in his fights since. There were defenses against Tavoris Cloud, Tony Bellew and Andrzej Fonfara, then easy outings against Dmitry Sukhotsky, Sakio Bika and Tommy Karpency. After two years without an opponent ranked at the time in the Top 5 by THE RING, Stevenson was stripped of the championship. He'll begin to regain some respect if he faces unbeaten contenders Eleider Alvarez and Artur Beterbiev, both of whom are also with adviser Al Haymon. But first he'll face Thomas Williams Jr. this July.

Kovalev went from seizing a title from Nathan Cleverly to defending against Ismayl Sillah and then keeping busy against lower-level foes Cedric Agnew and Blake Caparello. Then came a big win over Bernard Hopkins to unify three belts, followed by a technical knockout over Jean Pascal. He's been in a holding pattern since then, taking out woefully outclassed mandatory Nadjib Mohammedi and having no problem dispatching Pascal in their rematch. Kovalev is scheduled to face Isaac Chilemba in July, a homecoming fight in Russia before a clash with Andre Ward.

THE DEPTH

Ward was previously the super middleweight champ but left that division for good. He gave Sullivan Barrera his first loss in March and hopes to have one more fight before challenging Kovalev. Beterbiev returned in June after a yearlong layoff due to an injury with a stoppage of Ezequiel Maderna. Alvarez is coming off a decision over Chilemba and is awaiting his first bout of 2016. Fonfara fell short against Stevenson in 2014 but had a good 2015, embarrassing Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and then winning a war against Nathan Cleverly. He was scheduled to face Joe Smith Jr. in mid-June. Former titleholder Juergen Braehmer is 37, has a secondary title not recognized by this magazine and seems to be in no rush to challenge any of the other top names.

THE FUTURE

Vyacheslav Shabranskyy recorded a good win last year over Yunieski Gonzalez, who was coming off a robbery loss to Jean Pascal. Williams was stopped by Gabriel Campillo in 2014 but recently picked up a highlight-reel win over Edwin Rodriguez. Both still have a long way to go to be among those listed above. Egor Mekhontsev won Olympic gold in 2012 and is 12-0 as a pro. Bronze medalist Oleksandr Gvozdyk is 10-0. Others who are unbeaten but still have much to prove: Dmitry Bivol, Dominic Boesel, Marcus Browne, Sergei Ekimov, Ahmed Elbiali, Umar Salamov, Erik Skoglund and Avni Yildirim. Radiovje Kalajdzic has a loss even though most observers felt he deserved the decision against Browne. ★

We'll see what Andre Ward has left when (if?) he fights Sergey Kovalev.

TOM HOGAN

For years, the RING champion at 168 – Andre Ward – rarely fought. That allowed Carl Froch to seize the spotlight, with five straight wins after his loss to Ward. That included a one-punch knockout over George Groves in his finale in front of 80,000 fans. By 2015, we knew changes were coming. Froch was

mulling retirement. Ward was mulling a move to light heavyweight. They both pulled the trigger. Their departures paved the way for others to arrive. Last year brought the beginning of an unofficial tournament to find out who the best in the division are. The process continues in 2016. There's no superstar at super middleweight but there are good fighters trying to elevate themselves at the expense of their rivals.

THE STARS

Badou Jack went from suffering an upset loss in one minute in 2014 to winning a world title against Anthony Dirrell in 2015. Since then, he has beaten George Groves by split decision and was held to a highly controversial draw against Lucian Bute this past April. (Bute also tested positive for a banned substance.) Jack is likely to face James DeGale in a unification bout later this year. DeGale picked up a vacant belt by outpointing Andre Dirrell last year, won a spirited bout over Bute and then picked up a win in a tougher-than-expected outing against Rogelio Medina on the same card as Jack-Bute. Gilberto Ramirez unseated one of the few remaining fixtures, shutting out Arthur Abraham in impressive fashion in April. Ramirez is due to be back in July. Felix Sturm picked up the remaining title in February by winning his rematch with Fedor Chudinov only to test positive for a banned substance afterward.

THE DEPTH

Chudinov shouldn't be written off because of his first pro loss, even if Sturm's positive test hadn't happened. The same can be said for the Dirrell brothers; Anthony picked up two wins after his loss while Andre notched his first in April. Callum Smith is an undefeated contender who is staying busy while hoping for a shot at the winner of DeGale vs. Jack. Groves has now come up short at the top three times, though he does have a victory over DeGale from earlier in their careers. He bounced back with two consecutive victories and was scheduled to face former middleweight contender Martin Murray in late June.

THE FUTURE

Those are the more established names. Others hoping to join them, or perhaps replace them, include D'Mitrius Ballard, Zac Dunn, Jesse Hart, Schiller Hyppolite, Vijender Singh and Tyron Zeuge. Meanwhile, it's possible that Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. will come down the rest of the way to 168 if he can make it, inserting himself into fights against any of the many Al Haymon-advised fighters (Bute, DeGale and the Dirrells). And while Gennady Golovkin's team has mentioned the idea of a move to this division, that probably won't happen until something — or rather someone — persuades him to come. ★

BEST PUNCHER
CALLUM SMITH

BEST BOXER
JAMES DEGALE

MOST PROTECTED
ZAC DUNN

IS HE STILL AROUND?
FELIX STURM

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
JAMES DEGALE VS. CALLUM SMITH

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
CALLUM SMITH

MOST FUN TO WATCH
GEORGE GROVES

ON THE WAY UP
CALLUM SMITH

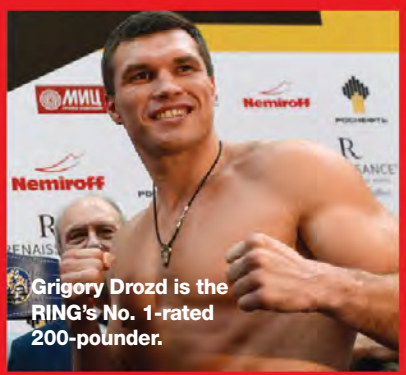
ON THE WAY DOWN
ARTHUR ABRAHAM

Badou Jack (foreground) drew with Lucian Bute in April. Next up: James DeGale.

MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

RANKING THE DIVISIONS

THE WEIGHT CLASSES 1-17 BASED ON THE QUALITY AND DEPTH OF THE BOXERS



Grigory Drozd is the RING's No. 1-rated 200-pounder.

1. CRUISERWEIGHT
2. LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT
3. FEATHERWEIGHT
4. WELTERWEIGHT
5. FLYWEIGHT
6. JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT
7. MIDDLEWEIGHT
8. JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT
9. JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT
10. JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT
11. JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT
12. BANTAMWEIGHT
13. HEAVYWEIGHT
14. JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT
15. SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT
16. LIGHTWEIGHT
17. STRAWWEIGHT

Daniel Jacobs enhanced his image with a first-round KO of Peter Quillin in December.

BEST PUNCHER
GENNADY GOLOVKIN

BEST BOXER
GENNADY GOLOVKIN

MOST PROTECTED
RYOTA MURATA

IS HE STILL AROUND?
GABRIEL ROSADO

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
CANELO ALVAREZ VS. GENNADY GOLOVKIN

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
DANIEL JACOBS

MOST FUN TO WATCH
GENNADY GOLOVKIN

ON THE WAY UP
CHRIS EUBANK JR.

ON THE WAY DOWN
DANIEL GEALE

In the span of nearly 13 years there were just four RING champions in the 160-pound division. In the past two years, however, the championship has changed hands twice. The new king is Canelo Alvarez and like the last one, Miguel Cotto, he is doing seemingly everything he can to stay away from the most worthy challenger to the throne, Gennady Golovkin. The middleweight story leads off with Alvarez and Golovkin but it doesn't end with them. There also is an interesting mix of contenders, prospects and fan-friendly fighters who are worth showcasing on television.

THE STARS

Alvarez took the easy route instead of the best possible opponent, meeting Amir Khan in May for a fight that was enough of a curiosity to anchor a pay-per-view telecast. The lineal 160-pound champion knocked out a true 147-pound contender in a bout with a weight limit of 155 pounds and then said he wanted Golovkin. As for "GGG," he's waiting to see if Canelo will back up his talk but otherwise hasn't been waiting to get in the ring. Golovkin made easy work of mandatory challenger Dominic Wade in April, notching his 22nd-straight knockout.

THE DEPTH

The other major title is held by Billy Joe Saunders, who outpointed Andy Lee in December. A hand injury postponed his first defense against Max Bursak. Another contender in line for Golovkin is Daniel Jacobs, who was expected to fight in July for the first time since his spectacular first-round stoppage of Peter Quillin late last year. Chris Eubank Jr. may need to recover from the mental toll of critically injuring Nick Blackwell in March but otherwise could also be in line for a big fight soon. David Lemieux bounced back from his title loss to Golovkin by dominating Glen Tapia in May. Filling out the division are fighters like Hassan N'Dam, Tureano Johnson and Curtis Stevens, who tend to guarantee good action whenever they step into the ring.

THE FUTURE

He may not be the future at 37, but Avtandil Khurtsidze punched his ticket by taking out previously unbeaten Antoine Douglas in March. There's plenty more time to monitor the development of other prospects, some of whom we're more sold on than the rest. The list includes Rob Brant, Hugo Centeno Jr., Sergiy Derevyanchenko, brothers Esquiva and Yamaguchi Falcao, Ievgen Khytrov, Ryota Murata, Anthony Ogogo and Maciej Sulecki. Some of these names have been in this section before, which only accentuates that they still need more experience to grow from prospects into contenders. ★

Martinez-Jeff Bottari/Getty Images; Alvarez-NAOKI FUKUDA

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT

Floyd Mayweather Jr. hadn't fought at 154 since 2013 but he was still allowed to hold onto two of his world titles here until months after he retired. With those belts vacant, and with Canelo Alvarez fighting ever so slightly above the junior middleweight limit, that opened up things so that a bunch of recognizable names and rising contenders could jockey for position and battle for prominence. We've crowned four new titleholders since fall 2015. Amusingly, any clarity won't come from them fighting each other, because three of those four likely won't share a ring unless it's in training. Fortunately, there are a few other fighters awaiting shots at them.

THE STARS

Jermall and Jermell Charlo are twin brothers and won't fight each other. And then there's Erislandy Lara, who trains alongside Jermall with trainer Ronnie Shields. It's uncertain whether Lara and Jermell would be willing to fight each other; Jermell isn't with Shields anymore. All three appeared on the same card in May. Jermall, who obliterated Cornelius Bundrage to win a title in September, stepped up his level of opposition and outpointing former titleholder Austin Trout in his second defense. Lara, who was elevated from a secondary title after Mayweather's retirement, won a unanimous decision over Vanes Martirosyan in a rematch of their 2012 technical draw. Jermell picked up a vacant belt, coming from behind on the scorecards to stop John Jackson.

THE DEPTH

Liam Smith also won a vacant title, stopping John Thompson last October. He's made two defenses since, stopping Jimmy Kilrain Kelly in December and Predrag Radosevic this past June. Rising up in this division is highly touted Julian Williams, who has three consecutive knockouts and is now in position to face Jermall Charlo. And while Charles Hatley shoved Jermall after the Trout win, Hatley is actually Jermell's mandatory challenger. He flew to Australia and defeated Anthony Mundine last November. Next in line after Hatley will be the winner of a June fight (scheduled to take place after this issue of THE RING went to press) between former titleholder Demetrius Andrade, who is undefeated but was stripped of his title in 2015, and Willie Nelson, winner of two in a row since a decision loss to Martirosyan. Trout and Martirosyan are good enough to be competitive but continue to fall short.

BEST PUNCHER
JERMALL CHARLO

BEST BOXER
ERISLANDY LARA

MOST PROTECTED
JACK CULCAY

IS HE STILL AROUND?
ANTHONY MUNDINE

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
JERMALL CHARLO VS. JULIAN WILLIAMS

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
DEMETRIUS ANDRADE

MOST FUN TO WATCH
MIGUEL COTTO

ON THE WAY UP
ERICKSON LUBIN

ON THE WAY DOWN
ISHE SMITH

THE FUTURE

Tony Harrison is trying to rebuild from a loss himself. He beat Fernando Guerrero by technical knockout in March for his second straight victory since losing to Nelson via stoppage last year. Miguel Cotto, who was undersized as the middleweight champion, is likely coming back to 154 after his loss to Alvarez but hasn't mentioned any of the above names. Some prospects looking to make names for themselves include Jack Culcay, Terrell Gausha, Jarrett Hurd, Erickson Lubin and Liam Williams.★

Jermall Charlo's stock rose after his victory over Austin Trout (right).

NAOKI FUKUDA

Kell Brook will be tested by Jessie Vargas on Sept. 3 in Sheffield, England.

Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao say they've fought their last fights. The sport of boxing still survived and so, too, will the division in which they fought most of their fights in recent years. Even though those who remain aren't as great as those who previously reigned, there's still plenty to look forward to. The titleholders are trying to solidify their footing. The pool of contenders helps make 147 one of the deepest weight classes. It can get deeper yet. As has long been the trend, the junior welterweights of yesterday are the welterweights of today. There's an incredible combination of matches that can be made. And even the fights involving some of the also-rans promise to be fun.

THE STARS

Keith Thurman and Shawn Porter aren't big stars, never mind superstars like Mayweather and Pacquiao were, but they were scheduled to fight each other with their future aspirations on the line on June 25. The man who dethroned Porter for a world title, Kell Brook, has faced three lesser foes since. His promoter made offers to Amir Khan in the past and still wants a significant opponent to step up. They convinced Jessie Vargas to meet Brook in a unification bout later this year. Perhaps another one to step up will be Errol Spence, a gifted contender who just plowed through Chris Algieri and needs a win over Leonard Bundu to become Brook's mandatory contender.

THE DEPTH

Brook and Thurman hold two of the world titles. The others belong to Vargas, who won a vacant belt by stopping Sadam Ali and is hoping to avenge a decision loss to Tim Bradley, and former 140-pound champion Danny Garcia, who won a vacant belt as well after outpointing Robert Guerrero. Bradley still lingers after losing his rubber match against Pacquiao in April. Khan will return to the division once he recovers from his knockout loss to Canelo Alvarez. Lamont Peterson didn't look his best in beating Felix Diaz last October but still belongs in there with any of the above. Adrien Broner says he's coming back to 147 because he can't make the junior welterweight limit; a lingering criminal court case could derail those plans. Familiar but fading names in Guerrero and Andre Berto remain in the mix as B-sides who won't rise high in the rankings but at least will go down fighting.

BEST PUNCHER
KEITH THURMAN

BEST BOXER
KELL BROOK

MOST PROTECTED
DANNY GARCIA

IS HE STILL AROUND?
SHANE MOSLEY

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
KELL BROOK VS. AMIR KHAN

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
ERROL SPENCE

MOST FUN TO WATCH
KEITH THURMAN

ON THE WAY UP
ERROL SPENCE

ON THE WAY DOWN
DEVON ALEXANDER

THE FUTURE

There are a handful of prospects trying to work their way up. Frankie Gomez, who arrived at welterweight last year after struggling to make 140, notched a shutout of Mauricio Herrera in May. Sammy Vasquez is coming off a win over Aron Martinez, who gave Guerrero tons of trouble last year and then upset Devon Alexander. Neither Gomez nor Vasquez has shown himself to be a true contender just yet. There's also Jeff Horn, who stopped Randall Bailey in April; Egidijus Kavaliauskas, who's still early in his career; and Konstantin Ponomarev, whose injury cost him a fight with Spence. ★

LONGEST-REIGNING TITLEHOLDERS

The list below showcases the sport's 10 most established titleholders (RING, IBF, WBA, WBC or WBO). Amazingly, all but two names from last year's list are gone. Only three departures resulted from defeats: Wladimir Klitschko, Marco Huck and Takashi Uchiyama. Two moved up in weight: Andre Ward and Danny Garcia. Two were stripped: Yoan Pablo Hernandez and Guillermo Rigondeaux, though Rigondeaux was reinstated in May after titleholder Carl Frampton vacated. And one retired: Floyd Mayweather Jr. That makes Donnie Nietes, who was No. 6 last year, the new No. 1.

Reigns are through June 5, 2016, and cover an uninterrupted span in which a fighter held at least one world title in that division. We do not include interim titles or "regular" titles from a sanctioning body with a "super" titleholder. In other words, THE RING recognizes only one titleholder in each sanctioning body.

1. DONNIE NIETES
RING, WBO JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT
56 MONTHS
2. SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
WBC BANTAMWEIGHT
55 MONTHS
3. DENIS LEBEDEV
IBF, WBA CRUISERWEIGHT
43 MONTHS
4. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
IBF, WBA, WBC MIDDLEWEIGHT
43 MONTHS
5. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
WBA, WBO FLYWEIGHT
38 MONTHS
6. ADONIS STEVENSON
WBC LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT
36 MONTHS
7. SERGEY KOVALEV
WBA, WBO LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT
33 MONTHS
8. KOHEI KONO
WBA JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT
26 MONTHS
9. CARLOS CUADRAS
WBC JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT
24 MONTHS
10. VASYL LOMACHENKO
WBO FEATHERWEIGHT
23 MONTHS

Note: Lebedev's reign began when Guillermo Jones was declared WBA "champion in recess" in October 2012; Lebedev lost to Jones in 2013 but was reinstated after Jones failed a drug test. Golovkin's reign began when Daniel Geale was stripped of his WBA title in early November 2012.

MATCHROOM BOXING

Terence Crawford (left) and Viktor Postol will meet on July 23 to determine the best 140-pounder.

The two best fighters are about to face each other. There isn't too much else to look forward to beyond Terence Crawford vs. Viktor Postol. Most of the other big names have gone up to welterweight over the years, drawn by the allure of being in the same division as Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao or merely needing seven pounds of relief on the scales. The deep 147-pound division continues to attract fighters, which means the ranks at 140 have been ravaged and have yet to be replenished. Danny Garcia and Lamont Peterson finally departed. Jessie Vargas left. Lucas Matthysse says he is headed up there, too. Adrien Broner claims he grew out of the weight class. Crawford and Postol are the two remaining sharks who'll soon be fighting for control of the shallow end.

THE STARS

Crawford arrived here last year after his lightweight reign, capturing a vacant world title with a win over Thomas Dulorme and stopping Dierry Jean and Henry Lundy in his two defenses. As talented as Crawford clearly is, Postol may be his toughest test yet. The lanky boxer captured attention in 2014 with the way he moved around Selcuk Aydin for 11 rounds before scoring a one-punch knockout. He was Garcia's mandatory challenger, a challenge that Garcia paid to bypass in favor of facing Peterson. When Garcia vacated, Postol impressed by dropping and then stopping Lucas Matthysse to win a world title. Crawford-Postol is scheduled for a July 23 pay-per-view.

BEST PUNCHER
TERENCE CRAWFORD

BEST BOXER
TERENCE CRAWFORD

MOST PROTECTED
ADRIEN BRONER

IS HE STILL AROUND?
HUMBERTO SOTO

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV

MOST FUN TO WATCH
RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV

ON THE WAY UP
ANTONIO OROZCO

ON THE WAY DOWN
CESAR RENE CUENCA

THE DEPTH

Beyond them? Broner went from winning a vacant belt against Khabib Allakhverdiev last October to losing it on the scales before beating the overmatched Ashley Theophane in April. Ruslan Provodnikov is still around, and deservingly so given that his last three losses have all been close: Tim Bradley, Chris Algieri and Matthysse. He was scheduled to meet John Molina in June, a compelling matchup that would've been even more fun if Molina wasn't one bout removed from a three-fight losing streak. Less known on the periphery but deserving of attention is Eduard Troyanovsky, who won a title from Cesar Rene Cuenca last November and then stopped him again in their April rematch. Finally, there's Ricky Burns, who lost to Crawford and Dejan Zlaticanin at 135 in 2014 and to Omar Figueroa at junior welterweight last year. He has won three straight, including a TKO of Michele Di Rocco for a vacant world title in late May.

THE FUTURE

A fighter once thought to be the future, Amir Imam, suffered a stunning stoppage loss last year to Adrian Granados. Other prospects are hoping they'll be good enough to avoid suffering the same fate. They include Jack Catterall, Sergey Lipinets, Hiroki Okada, Antonio Orozco, Regis Prograis, Jose Ramirez and Anthony Yigit. ★

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

There is no leader of the pack here, not while so many of those ranked at or near the top are either relatively new to those spots or have merely stuck around in a shallow division. The longest reigning of the three titleholders, Terry Flanagan, won his belt in July 2015. Anthony Crolla earned his last November and Rances Barthelemy picked up a title this past December. By the time you read this, the vacant fourth belt will belong to the victor of a June bout between Dejan Zlaticanin and late replacement Franklin Mamani. Even that belt's flawed former owner, Jorge Linares, held the title for less than 14 months and just two successful defenses before an injury sidelined him.

THE STARS

Flanagan won his title when Jose Zepeda called it a night after two rounds because of an injured shoulder. His first defense was just as quick but much more emphatic, a drubbing of Diego Magdaleno. Flanagan followed that with a decision over Derry Mathews in March. He's expected back in July. Crolla, who like Flanagan is from Manchester, knocked out Darleys Perez with a body shot and then turned to the same weapon to overcome a good challenge from Ismael Barroso this past May. It's quite a story for a fighter who was badly hurt and hospitalized with a fractured skull after confronting burglars in his neighborhood. Barthelemy, meanwhile, went from being a 130-pound titleholder to jumping to junior welterweight before dropping down to 135, where he took a wide decision over Denis Shafikov to win a vacant belt. In his first defense he won a split decision, which should've been unanimous, over former titleholder Mickey Bey.

THE DEPTH

Zlaticanin beat Petr Petrov in 2013, picked up a decision win over Ricky Burns in 2014 in Burns' home territory and took out Ivan Redkach impressively last year. He was supposed to challenge Linares. Instead, he was due to face Mamani. There's very little beyond that. The aforementioned Barroso and Perez will likely work toward another title shot. Petrov has picked up five straight wins, beating Diaz and Marvin Quintero most recently. Shafikov's return from the Barthelemy loss came after our deadline. Adrian Estrella was knocked out in two rounds down at 130 last year but has won four straight at 135. And Argenis Mendez has losses to Barthelemy at 130 and Robert Easter at 135.

THE FUTURE

Easter, a protege of Adrien Broner, officially moved from prospect to contender with that victory over Mendez. Richard Commey made that same transition recently. Others who've been fighting at lightweight might be moving down to 130, including Yuriorkis Gamboa, who has fought just twice since his 2014 battle with Terence Crawford, and Felix Verdejo, who is staying busy in 2016 but has not looked as promising as he did earlier in his career. ★

BEST PUNCHER
DEJAN ZLATICANIN

BEST BOXER
JORGE LINARES

MOST PROTECTED
RICHARD COMMEY

IS HE STILL AROUND?
MZONKE FANA

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
JORGE LINARES VS. DEJAN ZLATICANIN

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
ISMAEL BARROSO

MOST FUN TO WATCH
DEJAN ZLATICANIN

ON THE WAY UP
ROBERT EASTER

ON THE WAY DOWN
ARGENIS MENDEZ

Anthony Crolla (right, against Darleys Perez) has come a long way since he was injured by burglars.

DAVE THOMPSON

Takashi Uchiyama's upset loss to Jezreel Corrales shook up the 130-pound division.

The sudden upheaval at the top of this division was both stunning and thrilling. For years, no junior lightweight roundup could begin without mentioning Takashi Uchiyama, who'd reigned since the beginning of 2010, and Takashi Miura, his Japanese countryman who lost to Uchiyama in 2011 but went on to pick up a title of his own in 2013. But then Miura lost a classic battle and his belt to Francisco Vargas last November and Uchiyama suffered a three-knockdown second-round stunner to Jezreel Corrales this past April. The two new titleholders are joined by two fresh faces, two familiar names and two rising featherweights whose impact on the division is still to be determined.

THE STARS

Uchiyama had made his name with a nice run of knockouts, though he'd also been put down on the mat himself on more than one occasion. He's 36 now and this loss might signal his decline. We'll see whether he can bounce back. Miura returned with an easy victory in May. He wants a rematch with Vargas but had to wait because Vargas had a fight against gritty veteran Orlando Salido in June, a delightful battle that ended with a draw. Salido was coming off a loss and a controversial draw against Roman Martinez, who'd lost to a pair of better 130-pounders in the past and was due to defend against 126-pound titleholder Vasyl Lomachenko in June.

BEST PUNCHER
TAKASHI UCHIYAMA

BEST BOXER
JOSE PEDRAZA

MOST PROTECTED
NICHOLAS WALTERS

IS HE STILL AROUND?
JHONNY GONZALEZ

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
FRANCISCO VARGAS VS. ORLANDO SALIDO II

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
JAVIER FORTUNA

MOST FUN TO WATCH
ORLANDO SALIDO

ON THE WAY UP
SAUL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE WAY DOWN
TAKASHI UCHIYAMA

THE DEPTH

We'll see if Corrales' first defense shows him to be an ascendant talent or rather someone who caught an aging Uchiyama at the right time. The fourth world title, meanwhile, belongs to Jose Pedraza, who picked up the vacant belt last year with a win over Andrey Klimov, had a tough outing in a split decision over Edner Cherry and then outpointed Stephen Smith this past April. Then there is contender Javier Fortuna, who is coming off victories over Bryan Vasquez and Carlos Velasquez and was scheduled to face Jason Sosa in June. If Sosa's name is familiar, it's because he was in a controversial draw last December with former featherweight titleholder Nicholas Walters. As for Walters, he turned down an offer to face Lomachenko at 130 and has squandered the momentum he had after beating Nonito Donaire at 126 in 2014, even losing his title on the scales last year.

THE FUTURE

There's even more to follow. Miguel Roman is due for a title shot. Many of his 11 losses came to recognizable names relatively early in his career. He has since won 17 straight since 2013. Lightweight contender Felix Verdejo is considering moving down to 130. Tevin Farmer has strung together 14 victories since his last loss. And we're following the trajectories of Jaime Arboleda, Mario Barrios, Miguel Berchelt, Carlos Ramirez, Saul Rodriguez and Liam Walsh, among others. ★

TURO YAMANAKA

So much talent passes through this division. It might not soon approach the glory years with permutations of Marco Antonio Barrera, Naseem Hamed, Juan Manuel Marquez, Erik Morales and Manny Pacquiao but there's a delightful combination of matches that can be made. As has been the issue in this sport, and particularly this weight class, it's just a matter of making them. We never got Yuriorkis Gamboa vs. Juan Manuel Lopez or Nonito Donaire vs. Abner Mares but we did get one truly desirable fight last year and can expect at least one more this summer. Most of the top names are with adviser Al Haymon, while a couple others are with promoter Top Rank. The two recently came to a legal settlement, which might open the door to collisions between their fighters that hadn't been likely before.

BEST PUNCHER
JESUS CUELLAR

BEST BOXER
VASYL LOMACHENKO

MOST PROTECTED
JOSH WARRINGTON

IS HE STILL AROUND?
SIMPIWE VETYEKA

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
GARY RUSSELL JR. VS. LEO SANTA CRUZ

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
JESUS CUELLAR

MOST FUN TO WATCH
LEO SANTA CRUZ

ON THE WAY UP
OSCAR VALDEZ

ON THE WAY DOWN
EVGENY GRADOVICH

THE STARS

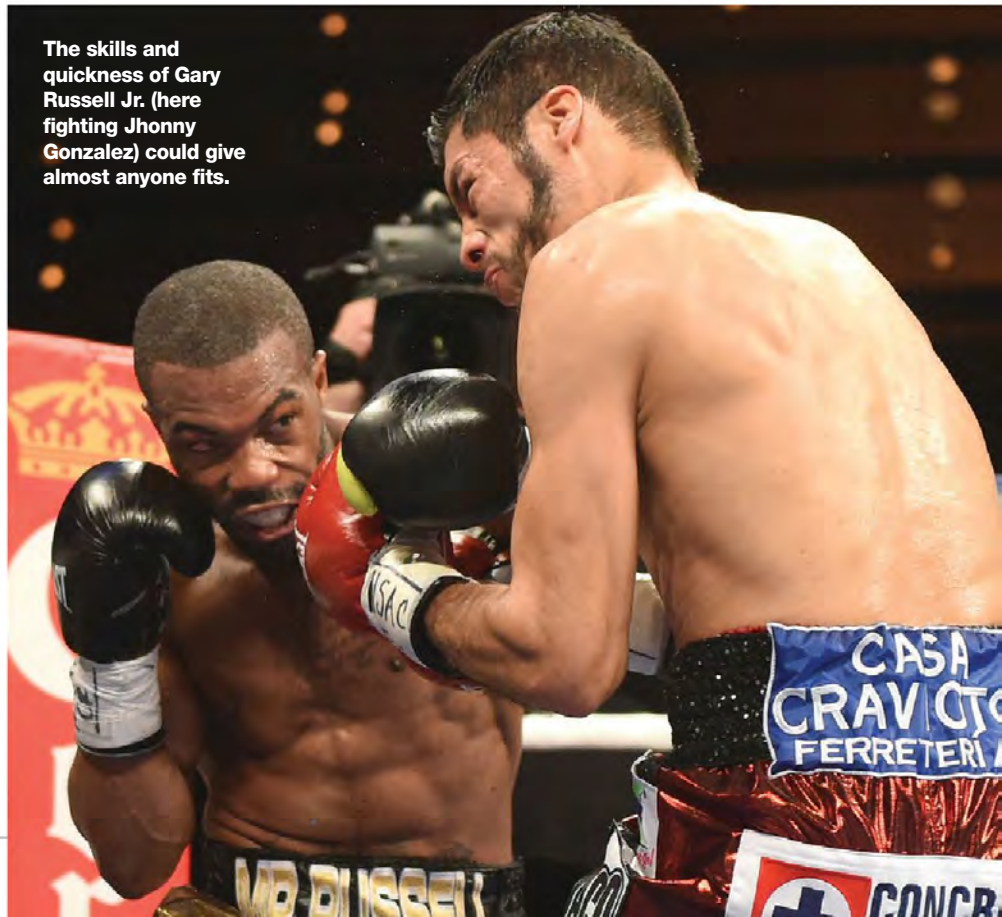
Leo Santa Cruz moved up from 122 last year and soon took on and outpointed former titleholder Abner Mares in a good battle, picking up a vacant title in the process. The first defense came in another scrap, a stoppage of Kiko Martinez, and now hopes are high for an entertaining collision with rising junior featherweight star Carl Frampton. Gary Russell Jr. came up short in his first title shot, losing a decision to Vasyl Lomachenko in 2014, but he rebounded with a demolition of Jhonny Gonzalez last year and defended with a quick drubbing of Patrick Hyland in April. Lomachenko has faced three relative unknowns since then and beaten them as easily as expected. In lieu of big fights at 126, he's testing the waters at 130 in June against titleholder Roman Martinez.

THE DEPTH

Lee Selby has the other major title, taken from Evgeny Gradovich in 2015 and defended since then with decisions over Fernando Montiel and Eric Hunter. He would like a unification bout with the Santa Cruz-Frampton winner. Jesus Cuellar was unfairly demoted to a secondary titleholder by the WBA but will still have a notable bout this June against Mares, who can't afford a second straight loss. Speaking of unfair, Simpiwe Vetyeka lost his title to Nonito Donaire on a headbutt-caused technical decision two years ago and still deserves another shot. Meanwhile, Oscar Escandon awaits the shot he was supposed to have last year before Russell was injured.

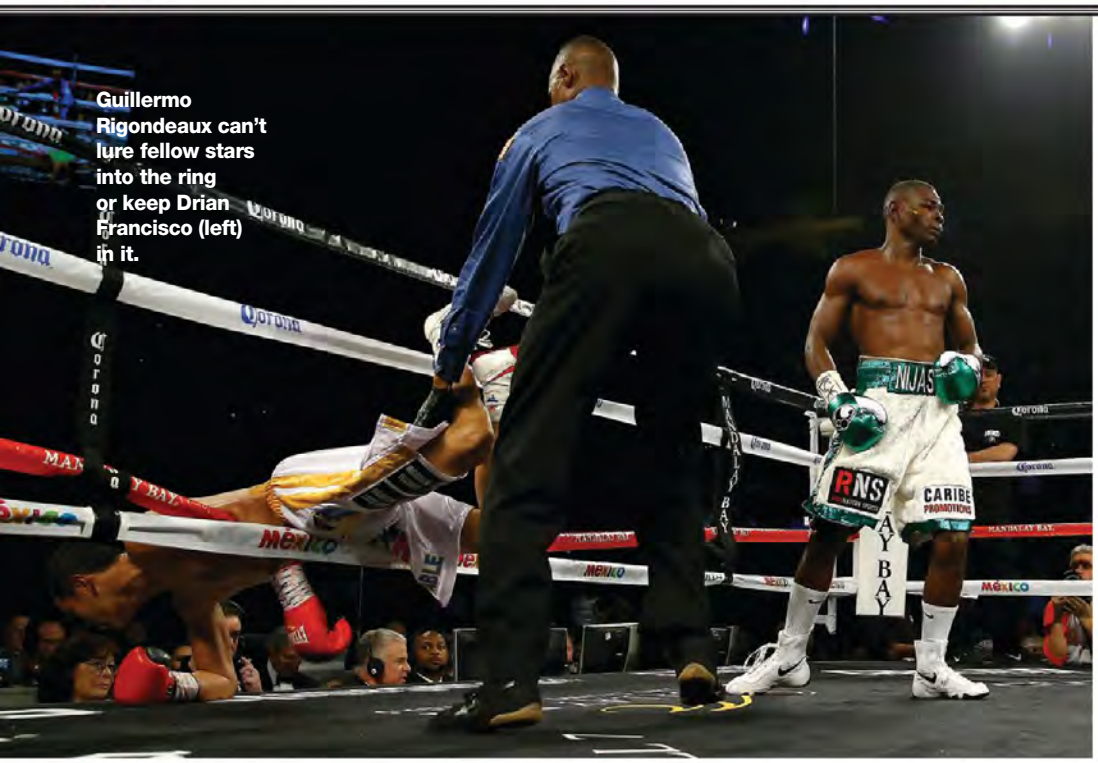
THE FUTURE

Lomachenko and contender Oscar Valdez are with Top Rank. Valdez is in line for Lomachenko, or at least his belt if Lomachenko wins at 130 and remains there. It'd be great if one or both is also able to face any or all of Haymon's featherweights. Others are continuing to develop, including Manuel Avila, Joseph Diaz, Abraham Lopez, Jessie Magdaleno, Julian Ramirez, Josh Warrington and Carlos Zambrano. ★



The skills and quickness of Gary Russell Jr. (here fighting Jhonny Gonzalez) could give almost anyone fits.

NAOKI FUKUDA



Guillermo Rigondeaux can't lure fellow stars into the ring or keep Drian Francisco (left) in it.

This division has a history of hosting some of the best fights each year and recent history has brought its share of enjoyable matchups, including Nonito Donaire going to battle against Cesar Juarez, and Julio Ceja coming off the canvas to stop Hugo Ruiz. This division also has a history of losing its best boxers to the 126-pound weight class. That's no different now. Last year, Leo Santa Cruz finally made the jump to featherweight. This year, Carl Frampton said he'd do the same after winning the biggest bout held at 122 in some time, though his victory over Scott Quigg, like Mayweather-Pacquiao, ended up being more of an event and less in the way of entertainment. We mention these things first because the No. 1 guy here, Guillermo Rigondeaux, is still rarely seen.

THE STARS

Rigondeaux signed with Roc Nation Sports late last year and was able to make it onto the Miguel Cotto vs. Canelo Alvarez pay-per-view card, outpointing Drian Francisco yet still not winning fans over in the process. Rigondeaux hasn't fought since. He didn't get a visa in time to travel for a March bout in the United Kingdom. He also was stripped of his RING championship for not facing a Top 5 contender for several years, though a sanctioning body did recently give him a world title back. As for Quigg, he's recovering from a jaw injury suffered in the Frampton fight and intends to remain at 122 to fight for a world title again. Donaire came back to this division after losing to Nicholas Walters at 126. He followed the Juarez war, which earned him a world title, with an easy defense over Zsolt Bedak in April.

BEST PUNCHER
HUGO RUIZ

BEST BOXER
GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX

MOST PROTECTED
REY VARGAS

IS HE STILL AROUND?
VIC DARCHINYAN

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
HUGO RUIZ-JULIO CEJA III

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
ALBERT PAGARA

MOST FUN TO WATCH
HUGO RUIZ

ON THE WAY UP
GENESIS SERVANIA

ON THE WAY DOWN
JUAN CARLOS SANCHEZ JR.

THE DEPTH

Ceja and Ruiz in February engaged in a rematch of their fight last year, when Ceja got up from the canvas to KO Ruiz. Ruiz put Ceja down again – in the opening minute – but this time Ceja didn't come back. He injured his ankle when he went down and couldn't hold Ruiz off. The referee stopped it only 51 seconds into the fight. Ruiz wants Frampton, who has moved to featherweight to face Santa Cruz. Ceja will need to recover. Meanwhile, a bout between Jonathan Guzman and Shingo Wake has been ordered to fill a vacant title. In addition, a bout between contender Moises Flores and former bantamweight titleholder Paulus Ambunda was set for June.

THE FUTURE

Two prospects who are on the cusp of bigger things are Albert Pagara and Rey Vargas. The timelines vary for several others, including Diego De La Hoya, Gavin McDonnell, Daniel Roman and Genesis Servania. As is always the case, their ceilings may also differ. Speaking of limits and uncertainties, one wild card is whether Randy Caballero can make 122. He lost his bantamweight title on the scales last year, then came in at 124 for a fight in February. ★

KEN ISHII/GETTY IMAGES

BANTAMWEIGHT

Last year we noted in this space that the second-longest active title reign in boxing had belonged to Anselmo Moreno — that is, until he lost a surprising, cut-shortened decision to Juan Carlos Payano in 2014. Right now, the second-longest active title reign in the sport once again belongs to a bantamweight titleholder, Shinsuke Yamanaka. He hasn't been beaten yet but he has looked vulnerable. Moreno isn't done yet. Payano's still looking to capitalize on his big win. And a division that once was home to action fighters like Vic Darchinyan, Nonito Donaire, Abner Mares and Leo Santa Cruz, among others, has a mix of talent but in some cases styles that aren't as aesthetically appealing.

BEST PUNCHER
SHINSUKE YAMANAKA

BEST BOXER
ANSELMO MORENO

MOST PROTECTED
PETCH SOR CHITPATTANA

IS HE STILL AROUND?
JULIO CESAR MIRANDA

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
SHINSUKE YAMANAKA VS. TOMOKI KAMEDA

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
ANSELMO MORENO

MOST FUN TO WATCH
SHINSUKE YAMANAKA

ON THE WAY UP
EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE WAY DOWN
TOMOKI KAMEDA

THE STARS

Yamanaka was fortunate to take a split decision over Moreno last year. That may have been a testament to Moreno's skills but it didn't help Yamanaka's cause when he then had to get up from two knockdowns to outpoint former 115-pound titleholder Liborio Solis this past March. Moreno had already earned himself a rematch with that performance but then made it official when he beat Suriyan Sor Rungvisai in April. Payano took a disappointing 10 months to make his first defense, edging Rau'shee Warren in 2015. Another 10-month layoff led Payano to a rematch with Warren that was scheduled for June.

THE DEPTH

The other two titles belong to Pungluang Sor Singyu, who picked up a vacant belt last year and defended it this past February, and Lee Haskins, who also ascended last year and made his first defense this past May. Also at bantamweight is Jamie McDonnell, who beat Tomoki Kameda twice in 2015 and added a victory against Fernando Vargas (no, not that one) in April. Kameda hasn't fought since. Longtime 112- and 115-pound titleholder Omar Narvaez is 40 years old and now at 118, though he still wants a rematch with junior bantamweight titleholder Naoya Inoue. Zolani Tete also has arrived in this division after vacating his belt at junior bantamweight. Negotiations have commenced for a possible bout with Haskins.

THE FUTURE

Marlon Tapales has a title shot against Sor Singyu set for this summer. There are other prospects who are further off. Among those we're watching develop are Ryan Burnett, Luis Nery, Emmanuel Rodriguez, Kevin Satchell, Lwandile Sityatha and Petch Sor Chitpattana. One who won't make that list is Alejandro Gonzalez, who knocked Carl Frampton down twice before losing their 122-pound title fight and then dropped to 118 and lost a decision to Karim Guerfi last November. ★

Mainstay Shinsuke Yamanaka has looked vulnerable of late.

JIJI PRESS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Naoya Inoue is one of the brightest young stars in the world.

The undoing of the most dominating force in the division, should it come, will be by his own hands. Literally, as Naoya Inoue spent nearly a year out of the ring with one hand injured and then injured both in his latest defense. That's a shame, since there's enough talent at 115, including a clear No. 2, to make it even more appealing to see whether Inoue can be as dominating as he appears capable of being. While the weight class hasn't screeched to a halt, there does seem to be a feeling that the junior bantamweight titleholders are waiting for the two best 112-pounders to move up and join them.

THE STARS

Inoue's jump from 108-pound titleholder to 115-pound chief came at the end of 2014, when he made a big statement by not only beating but demolishing Omar Narvaez. His injury sidelined him until the end of 2015, when he took out Warlito Parrenas in two. Inoue made his second defense this past May, outpointing David Carmona but potentially is going back out of commission for some time. Carlos Cuadras has been much more active, winning his belt in May 2014 and going 5-0-1 since then (the blemish is a technical draw due to a clash of heads early in a fight). He owes a defense to the man he beat for the title, Srisaket Sor Rungvisai.

THE DEPTH

Kohei Kono won a vacant title in early 2014 and has defended it since with one draw and two victories, including a decision that sent fellow Japanese star Koki Kameda into retirement and then a wide points win over Tanawat Phonnaku this past April. Kono has Luis Concepcion waiting for him. Concepcion ended David Sanchez's winning streak in September and then finished his trilogy with Hernan Marquez last December, winning a shutout on the scorecards for his first victory in their rivalry. McJoe Arroyo hasn't made a single defense since winning a vacant belt over Arthur Villanueva in July 2015. His team says there's an injury but Arroyo is in danger of being stripped of his belt. Villanueva has since bounced back with a pair of wins.

THE FUTURE

The big question on the horizon is whether Roman Gonzalez or Juan Francisco Estrada, or perhaps both, will move up from flyweight. Gonzalez would be of particular interest to junior bantamweights, for the tremendous challenge Gonzalez poses would also presumably come with a sizable HBO payday. This division also has a farm system with homegrown talent in prospects such as Jamie Conlan, Takuma Inoue (Naoya's younger brother), Sho Ishida, Jose Martinez, Rex Tso and Khalid Yafai. ★

BEST PUNCHER
NAOYA INOUE

BEST BOXER
NAOYA INOUE

MOST PROTECTED
REX TSO

IS HE STILL AROUND?
LUIS LAZARTE

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
NAOYA INOUE VS. ROMAN GONZALEZ

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI

MOST FUN TO WATCH
NAOYA INOUE

ON THE WAY UP
KHALID YAFAI

ON THE WAY DOWN
SONNY BOY JARO

NAOKI FUKADA

The unexpected happened last year: HBO gave a platform to the little guys, putting a deserving spotlight on the best boxer in the world, Roman Gonzalez, by pairing him with one of its biggest attractions, Gennady Golovkin. No compelling story can be told without a conflict or a destination. And so it's time to build toward a significant fight for "Chocolatito." There are a few options in the 112-pound division, which also is home to Juan Francisco Estrada, another fighter considered among the best in the world. Beyond them are fighters who are good but fall just shy of being able to beat any of the above, as well as a number of boxers who will find a comfortable destination at flyweight once their bodies can't make 105 or 108 anymore.

THE STARS

Gonzalez, a cult favorite while a titleholder at strawweight and junior flyweight, added to his legend when he won the RING championship at flyweight in 2014. He's made five successful defenses since, beating Edgar Sosa on HBO, breaking down Brian Viloria on a pay-per-view undercard and outpointing McWilliams Arroyo on HBO this past April. It's uncertain what's next. Many fans would love to see a rematch with Estrada. They fought at 108 in 2012; Gonzalez won the decision. Estrada then moved up and topped Viloria in 2013 to win two titles. He has won six since then, making five defenses in the process, most recently taking out Hernan Marquez in September. Estrada's been off since then with an injured hand. Gonzalez also could move up to 115, where opponents like Naoya Inoue and Carlos Cuadras seem enticing to hardcore fans.

BEST PUNCHER
ROMAN GONZALEZ

BEST BOXER
ROMAN GONZALEZ

MOST PROTECTED
NAWAPHON POR CHOKCHAI

IS HE STILL AROUND?
ADRIAN HERNANDEZ

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
ROMAN GONZALEZ VS. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA II

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
KAZUTO IOKA

MOST FUN TO WATCH
ROMAN GONZALEZ

ON THE WAY UP
DAIGO HIGA

ON THE WAY DOWN
JUAN CARLOS REVECO

THE DEPTH

Johnriel Casimero ended Amnat Ruenroeng's title reign in May with a knockout. Ruenroeng is high-risk, low-reward and will need to hope for another chance. Viloria is years removed from the top but still appears to have something left. Arroyo came up short twice but shouldn't be written off yet. Perhaps Viloria and Arroyo could take on fellow contenders in Kazuto Ioka and Juan Carlos Reveco. Former titleholder Moruti Mthalane has won nine straight since Nonito Donaire knocked him out in 2008. Pedro Guevera came to 112 after his title stint at 108 concluded last year. Francisco Rodriguez Jr. had a belt at 105 and was a contender at 108, leaving for flyweight after consecutive losses.

THE FUTURE

Zou Shiming hasn't moved toward another title shot but he was due to fight in June for the second time since the Ruenroeng loss, making his American debut in the process. We're wondering when RING champion Donnie Nietes or any of his fellow 108-pounders will join the flyweight fray. Others continuing their development at 112 include Artem Dalakian, Daigo Higa, Nawaphon Por Chokchai, Andrew Selby and Iwan Zoda. ★

Other 112-pounders can only hope Roman Gonzalez (right, against McWilliams Arroyo) moves up to 115.

MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

RING champion Donnie Nietes hasn't lost a fight since 2004.

For nearly five years now, Donnie Nietes has held a world title at 108, a reign that has lasted more than twice as long as the three other titleholders in his division combined. He has been THE RING champion for two-plus years. All of which is to say that it shouldn't be surprising if he soon decides he has accomplished enough and wants to try to capture a belt in a third weight class. It's not to say that Nietes has cleaned out the 108-pound division. He has picked up a few notable wins along the way. But the division won't be left barren should Nietes depart, not when there are still the others competing here and not when there's always the possibility of new names moving up from 105.

THE STARS

That's what Nietes did himself back in 2011, leaving behind his strawweight belt and soon capturing one at junior flyweight. He's gone 8-0-1 in his defenses since, including a win and a draw against Moises Fuentes, a wide decision over former 105-pound titleholder Francisco Rodriguez last year and a technical knockout over former 105-pound titleholder Raul Garcia this past May. Akira Yaegashi held a title at 105 and was champion at 112 before he ran into Roman Gonzalez. That drove him back down to 108, where he was knocked out by Pedro Guevara in 2014. Persistence worked out in his favor: He outpointed Javier Mendoza to pick up a belt in late 2015 and then edged Martin Tecuapetla in May.

THE DEPTH

Ryoichi Taguchi couldn't beat Naoya Inoue in 2013 but that didn't mean he couldn't still compete, as he outpointed Alberto Rossel to win a belt in late 2014 and has made three successful defenses since, all by technical knockout against opponents who clearly weren't top-tier. Ganigan Lopez also benefited from fighting on. He had six losses on his record when he took a majority decision and a title from Yu Kimura, who had dethroned the aforementioned Guevera. Lopez owes a fight to mandatory challenger Jonathan Taconing, winner of nine straight since his lone title shot to date ended in a cut-shortened technical decision. Guevera isn't that far behind in line. Randy Petalcorin also deserves to be in the picture; blatantly bad refereeing cost him a split decision to Omari Kimweri in April. And Rey Loreto has 13 losses but suffered most of them when he was young. He's 25 now and notched two relatively recent knockouts of Nkosinathi Joyi.

THE FUTURE

Kosei Tanaka has vacated his belt at 105 so that he can compete at 108. There's a question over whether Hekkie Budler, who lost a surprising decision and his belt at strawweight, will soon make the same decision. Given how many fighters here have lost but still matter, it may seem strange to merely spotlight the undefeated prospects. Nevertheless, the ones we're monitoring include Angel Acosta, Tibo Monabesa and Ken Shiro. ★

BEST PUNCHER
RANDY PETALCORIN

BEST BOXER
DONNIE NIETES

MOST PROTECTED
RYOICHI TAGUCHI

IS HE STILL AROUND?
JUAN JOSE LANDAETA

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
AKIRA YAEGASHI VS. RYOICHI TAGUCHI

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
JONATHAN TACONING

MOST FUN TO WATCH
AKIRA YAEGASHI

ON THE WAY UP
KEN SHIRO

ON THE WAY DOWN
NKOSINATHI JOYI

Boxing's heaviest division wasn't the only one to see a shakeup after its top fighter suffered a surprising defeat. Four months after Wladimir Klitschko lost to Tyson Fury, those who follow boxing's lightest division witnessed Hekkie Budler lose to Byron Rojas. We'll see whether Budler's time here is done or whether he regains his belt and sticks around. The other strawweights of note for now include a few undefeated fighters, a few who've suffered losses but proved they weren't yet done and a couple of former titleholders who want to regain glory.

BEST PUNCHER
JOSE ARGUMEDO

BEST BOXER
WANHENG MENAYOTHIN

MOST PROTECTED
REIYA KONISHI

IS HE STILL AROUND?
FLORANTE CONDES

MATCHMAKER'S DREAM
WANHENG MENAYOTHIN VS. KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
SAUL JUAREZ

MOST FUN TO WATCH
BYRON ROJAS

ON THE WAY UP
RIKU KANO

ON THE WAY DOWN
MERLITO SABILLO

THE STARS

Budler's loss to Rojas was a close one. He won't get an immediate rematch. Instead, Rojas owes a defense to wonderfully named mandatory challenger Knockout CP Freshmart. Rojas has two losses and three draws on his record; all came early in his career. The victory made him the second titleholder right now from Nicaragua. The first is Roman Gonzalez, who got his start in this same division. Freshmart last fought in February, picking up his second win over Carlos Buitrago. The senior titleholder here now is Wanheng Menayothin, who's listed at 41-0 and has made four successful defenses since winning his belt in late 2014. The third world title belongs to Jose Argumedo, who has three losses on his record but notched a split technical decision to unseat Katsunari Takayama last December.

THE DEPTH

Jose Antonio Jimenez edged Chao Zhong Xiong in May for the right to face Argumedo. The mandatory challenger to Menayothin, meanwhile, is Saul Juarez, who is coming off two wins over Adrian Hernandez at flyweight and then outpointed former titleholder Oswaldo Novoa at 105 this past March. Juarez gets the shot while Denver Cuello, who was in line to face him, instead opted against the fight because he couldn't make strawweight anymore.

THE FUTURE

Back to Budler. We'll see if he'll return to 108, where he'd been a contender until he suffered a split decision loss in 2011 and subsequently dropped down a division. We know that former 105-pound titleholder Kosei Tanaka will move up; he vacated his belt for that express purpose. Takayama, whose first of several title reigns began back in 2005, will get another chance. He's expected to face 18-year-old Riku Kano this summer for Tanaka's old title. Kano turned pro at 16 and is coming off a decision over former titleholder Merlito Sabillo. ★

Byron Rojas shot to prominence with his upset of Hekkie Budler.

DUIF DU TOIT/GALLO IMAGES

NAOKI FUKUDA

THE VOICE

LEO SANTA CRUZ'S FATHER/TRAINER IS BATTLING CANCER YET REMAINS IN CHARGE

By **Ron Borges**

Father/trainer Jose Santa Cruz has been behind son Leo's rapid rise.

Boxing called to Leo Santa Cruz from the start. Or at least it called his father, who willingly passed along the message. For as long as Leo can remember, The Voice, his father's voice, was in his ear.

Right from the first day he got on the bus his older brothers had so often taken to the Eddie Heredia Boxing Club in East L.A., The Voice was with him. It was harder to avoid than a stiff jab. More persistent than Julio Cesar Chavez's body punches.

It was there to guide him, to correct him, to encourage him and to cajole him. More than a few times it was there, it seemed, solely to scold him. So it goes when your father is also your trainer.

The Voice was waiting for him each day when he got home from school, informing him it was time to go train even though all he wanted to do was what every 8-year-old wants, which was to play with his friends. Sometimes he complained, occasionally he only went through the motions. But always he went. And always he listened.

When The Voice didn't have the money to cover bus fare they would all walk the 10 miles or so to the gym, a father and four sons, all chasing the same dream. But that dream wasn't Leo's in those days. It belonged to his father, Jose, who had come from Mexico to the United States seeking a better life for his family and to make his sons boxing champions.

All four tried their best but only the youngest survived the demands of an often cruel business that will never love you as much as you love it. Only Leo totally fulfilled his father's dream, winning the IBF bantamweight title four years ago. He hasn't stopped winning since.

But when Santa Cruz faces his next challenger, the U.K.'s Carl Frampton on July 30 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, The Voice will not be in his ear. While the now-27-year-old champion attempts to make his

second successful defense of the WBA featherweight title he won against former three-division champion Abner Mares last August, his father will be in a fight of his own. A fight with Stage 3 bone cancer in his spine that has limited the time he can devote to his son's trade.

On May 10, Jose began a month-long series of 10 chemotherapy treatments that will likely be followed by surgery. Before those began, the 56-year-old patriarch of the Santa Cruz clan had become so riddled with pain he could not walk to the ring apron, let alone to the gym. Often he moved only in a wheelchair, standing an agony too difficult some days to face. Hollering instructions? Not possible.

Bone cancer has done what nothing else could, quieting The Voice that has for 19 years pushed Leo to heights he might never have reached on his own. It has made for an odd training camp, with his older brother Antonio speaking to Leo in many of the same words his father always did but delivering them differently.

But inside the boxing ring change is necessary. No plan is fool-proof. Adjustments must be made. Often that is what separates champions from the rest of the world. Adjustments to opponents, adjustments to the disappointments of a boxer's life, adjustments to the passage of time and now to this. An adjustment to stillness.

"It's been hard," Santa Cruz admits. "I'm used to having him with me every day. He didn't ever miss no days. I miss him screaming at us, telling us what to do.

"Even when his body was hurting he would come when he could but finally it was hurting too much. I never seen him like this. My father never showed any pain before but he couldn't really hide it. You could see it on his face. It was a way, way different look from what I remember when I was little and he'd take us to the gym.

"He was always very strict. If we made one little mistake he'd be mad at us, screaming to do it right. Even though he'd get mad, it was for our own good. It was so we didn't make those mistakes in the ring against someone trying to hurt us. He'd be screaming in a good way. A trainer has to push you when you're tired.

"My brother has worked with my dad for my last four fights. They've watched Frampton and my father has told us what the strategy should be and what punches to throw. I don't think it's a problem. The message is the same. My brother just doesn't scream like that. He's a little calmer."

There is a time and place for calmness of course, but when the dream has not yet fully formed inside the boy, the man must raise his voice. What child can know the weight of a father's dream for him?

As a kid, all Leo Santa Cruz knew was that as long as he could remember, his brothers and his dad would go off to train, boxing gloves over their shoulders. It seemed like the family business, which in a sense it became.

But one by one the dream picked off the dreamers, breaking them as boxing so often does. Antonio, the eldest, simply declared one day that the dream did not belong to him. It was his father's. He had other ideas, although now here he is, back in the corner doing what his father once did for his brother. Being The Voice.

Robert was stopped by lupus, a malady he learned he was burdened with after losing a fight 11 years ago. Then the dream was handed to Jose Armando and he fulfilled a portion of it when he won an interim WBC lightweight title in 2006, only to be stopped by David Diaz in his next fight. He would later lose a second title challenge by split decision to Joel

Santa Cruz (left, against Vusi Malinga) is relying on brother Antonio while his father battles cancer.

NAOKI FUKUDA

Casamayor before being diagnosed with swelling on the brain after a loss to Zab Judah six years ago that forced him into retirement.

Then only Leo was left. To the young boy who had once wondered why he had to go to the gym when everyone else was playing in the Southern California sun had fallen the weight of a family's efforts and a father's hopes.

"Sometimes I just wanted to play with my friends but my dad would be there saying, 'You have to go train!'" Santa Cruz said. "I cried sometimes but it wasn't just me going. We all had to go so it was easier to do it. The more I went and the better I got the easier it was to go back.

"It was really hard sometimes when I was small. I'd see my friends outside playing and I wanted to do that. I wanted to stay home. There were days I kind of hated it. I'd get mad at them and didn't want to talk to them.

"Sometimes I'd goof off. He'd say, 'Go hit the bag' and I didn't want to do it. I'd hit it without trying. Sometimes he'd say, 'All right. Don't train. But do you want to become a world champion?' I thought about that and then I'd go."

He'd think as The Voice spoke. Then he'd go. Day after day. Month after month. Year after year. Until he was a world champion three times over.

Inherent pressure comes with carrying such a dream, pressure that only intensifies when the dream is somebody else's. Even more so when you become the last hope for its fulfillment.

The dream that made Leo Santa Cruz a bantamweight, junior featherweight and now featherweight titleholder began as a shared burden but by the end the full weight of it belonged only to him.

"I was the last one," Cruz said of his family's quest for a championship. "I had to give my all to make his dream come true. I pushed myself. I couldn't let his dream not come true. That first title was like a dream come true."

When it finally came, on June 2, 2012, at the Home Depot Center in Carson, California, not all that far from all those bus rides, Leo Santa Cruz turned to the man in the black cowboy hat whose voice had directed it all and realized what was to be done next.

He handed his father the IBF title belt.

"I just said, 'This belt is yours,'" Santa Cruz said. "If it wasn't for him, would I be a champion? I think I'd just be working at a job.

"At first I didn't really like boxing. I was in it for my dad. If I was alone, I wouldn't have kept going but we were all in it. As I got older, I did fall in love with it. I wanted to go back and train. But he's the one who took me when I didn't."

Jose was also The Voice in his ear as he prepared for Mares, one of boxing's most respected fighters. By then Santa Cruz had been criticized for being handled as carefully as fine china, first by promoter Oscar De La Hoya and now by adviser Al Haymon. Having grown weary of those charges as he built up an undefeated record and won two world titles, he finally insisted they get him Mares, who was 29-1-1 at the time and on a three-fight winning streak after having been stunningly knocked out by Jhonny Gonzalez in the first round of a featherweight title fight two years earlier.

Many in boxing felt the soft-spoken, almost shy Santa Cruz was in over

his head. It was his first main event despite his prior success and Mares was the headliner in the opinion of most fight fans.

Ominous negativity surrounded him but in his ear he heard one voice. The Voice. It was not screaming or hollering any more. It was telling him to believe in dreams. And in himself.

"It was the biggest fight of my career," Santa Cruz (32-0-1, 18 knockouts) said. "I was a little bit nervous. I didn't know what the outcome would be but my father told me I was better than him and if I trained hard, I'd win.

"He really worked with me on boxing. He kept telling me do what works but if it isn't, try something different. He decided that fight I should move. Box him. So we did.

"I know that's what's smart. To hit and not be hit. But I fight for the fans. They love it when we go toe to toe and they're the ones that pay. But that night I boxed."

Not initially he didn't. The two charged each other when the opening bell sounded, trading heavy punches for several rounds with Mares pressuring Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz refusing to retreat as 13,109 fans were going wild at Staples Center in downtown L.A.

Both fighters suffered cut eyes as a result of an inadvertent head-butt in the third round and Mares' other eye was cut late in the fight, which Santa Cruz won by an odd majority decision. Two judges saw it widely his way, 117-110, while the third had it a draw in a fight in which more than 2,000 punches were thrown, 1,037 of them by Santa Cruz.

He did indeed box as the fight wore on but he didn't always heed The Voice in his corner that night. The exchanges were often brutal, each man challenging the other's mettle until, finally, the time came to move as he'd been instructed. This time, Leo did as he was told.

"When I was trying to jab, I hit him with the right and the jab," Santa Cruz explained later. "We knew we could take control. My dad taught me how to beat him by boxing. It's what we did in the gym. We boxed. We like to give the fans great fights but we knew that we could outbox him so that's what we did."

Santa Cruz insists he'll do the same with Frampton, whom neither he nor his father believe will choose to stand and exchange freely as Mares did early. Because Frampton is the smaller man moving up from junior featherweight, where he had held the IBF and WBA belts, and lacks the kind of firepower that has made Santa Cruz a titleholder, it seems a wise working theory.

But strategies, like voices, can change sometimes. Leo Santa Cruz insists he's ready for changes in them both but knows too that the one voice that has helped to take him so far has already spoken to him about Carl Frampton, as he did Abner Mares and all those who preceded them into the ring.

He has watched the tape, formed the strategy, impressed upon Leo the need to pressure Frampton by working the body the way he used to watch Julio Cesar Chavez do when he faced opponents with superior movement and foot speed.

Chavez wore those fighters down, beating their ribs and their hips until their engines began to idle, their movement slowly coming to a halt. Leo Santa Cruz will go about that grim work while his father sits watching, The Voice now quiet but not unheard.

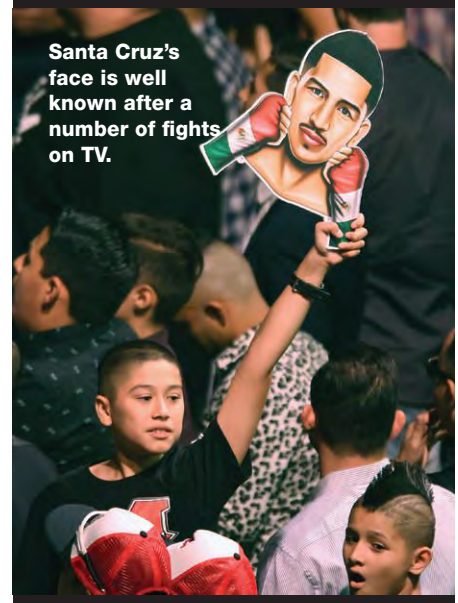
"He knows his style," Santa Cruz said. "He told us the strategy. I know what he'd be saying to me. I'll listen."

Just like when he was 8 and riding a bus that would take him to places he never thought possible.

"I never thought it would be like this," Leo Santa Cruz admits. "I thought it was impossible but my father believed it. To me, it was like trying to win the lottery. But I'm here now."

He is, and even in the silence he knows he's not alone. RING

NAOKI FUKUDA



Santa Cruz's face is well known after a number of fights on TV.

IMPRESSIVE RUN

Leo Santa Cruz (32-0-1, 18 knockouts) has been a dominating fighter at the elite level the past several years. Consider the numbers:

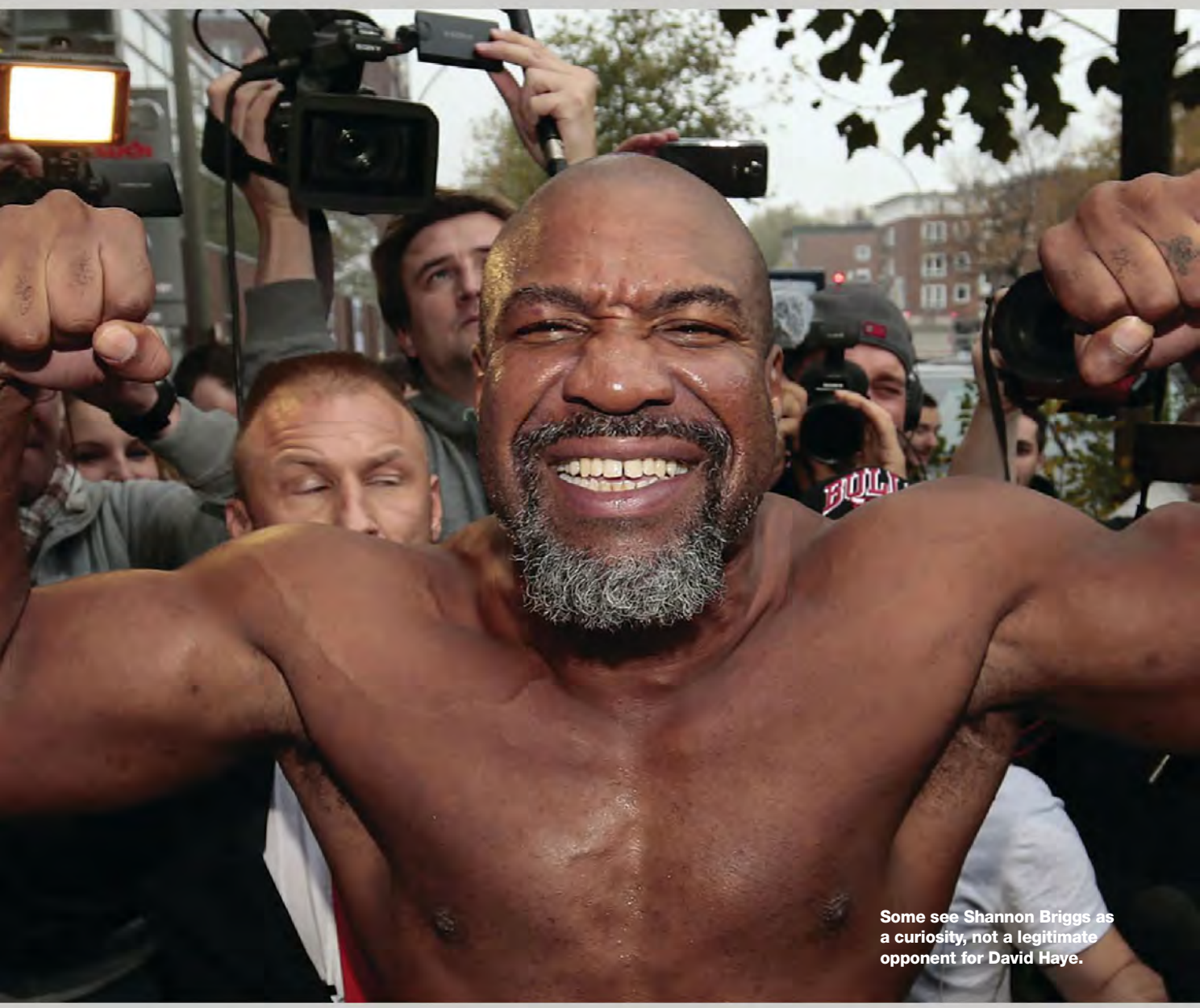
11-0
Santa Cruz's record in world title fights.

6
Knockouts in those title bouts.

3
World titles he has won.

3
Divisions in which he has won titles.

31
Consecutive victories.



Some see Shannon Briggs as a curiosity, not a legitimate opponent for David Haye.

A 'TIME WASTER'?

MANY FIND THE **DAVID HAYE-SHANNON BRIGGS** FIGHT HARD TO SWALLOW

David Haye and Amir Khan have received huge dollops of criticism in recent weeks. While there were columns calling for Khan to consider retirement after being banjoed by Canelo Alvarez, an old mechanism for a writer's opinion column, Eddie Hearn told me recently that Haye needs better opponents if he is serious about pursuing a fight with Anthony Joshua.

Haye had continued his comeback with a second victory in four months in what turned out to be a complete mismatch against the hapless but previously unbeaten Kosovan Arnold Gjergjaj in front of 15,000 fans at London's O2 Arena.

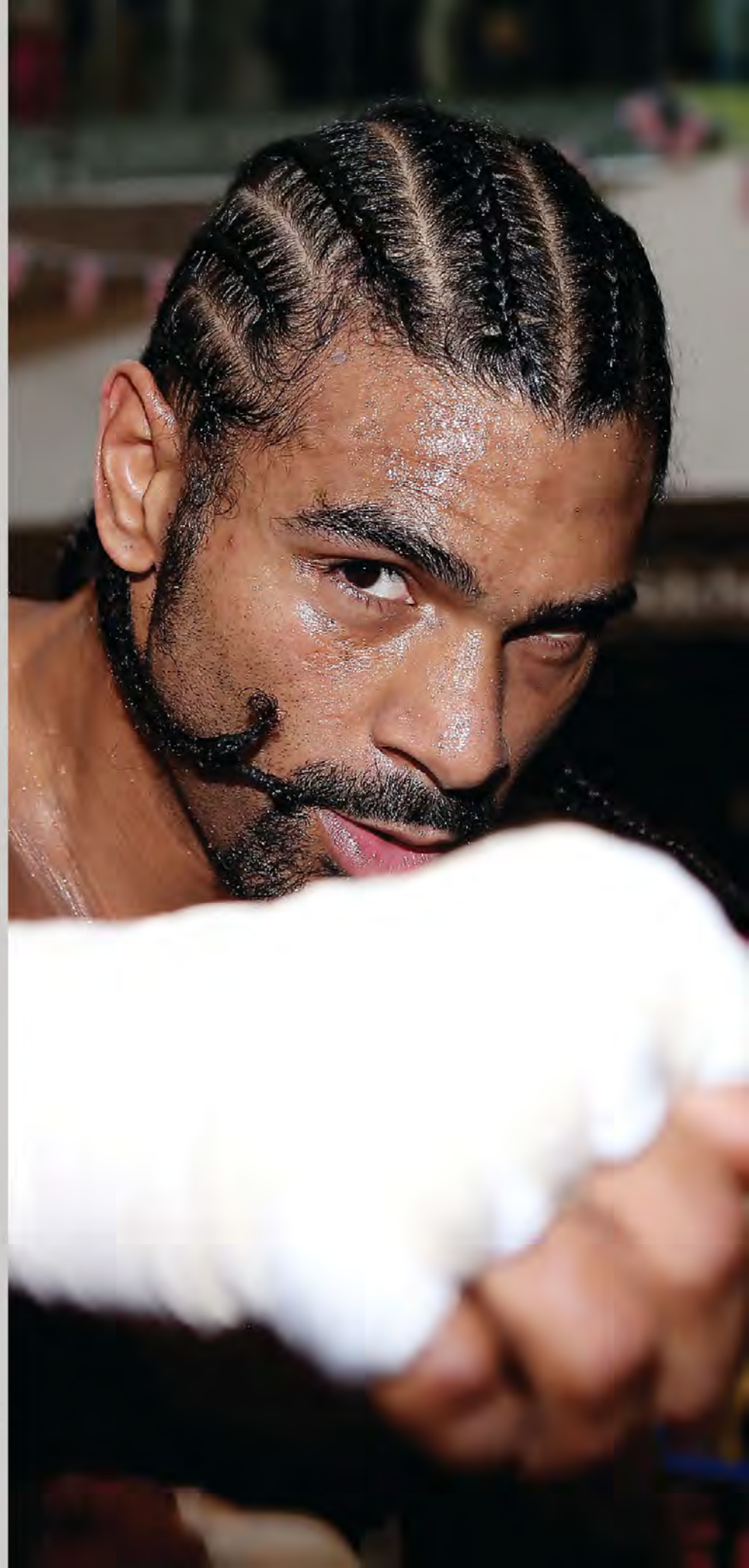
It was preceded on the night by 44-year-old American Shannon Briggs and his 23-year, 66-fight career dragging behind him like a heavy chain, up against late replacement Emelio Ezequiel Zarate of Argentina. Oh, it was horrible. Zarate had lost eight of his last 14 fights and Briggs stopped him at little more than two minutes into the first round. It was a ritual slaughter. Haye confirmed

that Briggs would be next on the list. Promotionally, it most probably is a mistake. Haye should move on to meaningful fights.

Haye endured a backlash after the Briggs fight was confirmed – from the boxing industry, insiders and purists. Yet Haye is creating viewing figures of 2.5 million on a new channel for boxing and drawing audiences of around 15,000-18,000 at the London indoor venue in Docklands. We know Briggs' best days are behind him but Haye and Briggs are ranked Nos. 6 and 7 by the WBA, which I am told will make that fight for its "regular" title in late summer. Criticized by several writers and promoters Frank Warren and Hearn, Haye has been labeled a "time waster" and accused of creating a WWE circus around his comeback.

And while on the subject of heavyweights, it was gratifying to spend an hour in the company of Evander Holyfield, the four-time world heavyweight champion and former undisputed world cruiserweight champion, who weighed in on the heavyweight scene currently replete with British interest. Holyfield had his unique take on both Tyson Fury (RING/WBA/WBO champ) and Anthony Joshua (IBF king).

"Tyson Fury had heart (against Wladimir Klitschko)," Holyfield said. "I don't care what anyone says. He got that done because he believed he could. He moves well. Klitschko didn't prepare for that. Can Klitschko make adjustments? I think this man Fury is still talking himself into doing something great. All he ever wanted was to call himself 'the champ.' He's done that. Now he's got nothing to lose. He's got that type of attitude. There's a



Haye remains a big draw even against less-than-inspiring opponents.

great chance he'll do it again. You can't change someone like that. You'll mess them up."

And Joshua? "You've always got to find someone who wants to break records and Anthony Joshua wants to do that," Holyfield said. "What if Don King hadn't done what he did for Mike Tyson? Tyson wouldn't be the youngest heavyweight champion in history. He was the youngest heavyweight because Don King gave him that opportunity.

"It's a great thing for Anthony Joshua to be winning at this level, at this stage. He's good enough, in my view. Leon Spinks fought Muhammad Ali for the world title in his eighth fight (and won)," said Holyfield, who reminded me that he won his first cruiserweight world crown in his 12th contest. "That means it's a person who has got the talent. Sometimes we just have to do it now, in that moment, because the moment can be lost."

TONY BELLEW AND RICKY BURNS

As mentioned, prizefighting in the U.K. is at an all-time high, at the very least in numbers of titleholders at world level. The latest pair making history in the last weekend of May were Ricky Burns and real-life "Rocky" Tony Bellew.

First, in Glasgow, Burns etched his name into the history books by becoming the first Scotsman to win world titles in three weight divisions when he stopped Italian Michele Di Rocco in the eighth round to land the vacant WBA junior welterweight title.

After a punch-perfect performance, 33-year-old Burns followed two Britons who have done the same – Duke McKenzie and Bob Fitzsimmons. McKenzie, incidentally, should be considered for the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Serious point.

Burns now deserves to join Scotland's top table of boxing greats alongside the likes of former world champions Benny Lynch, Walter McGowan, Jackie Paterson, Ken Buchanan and Jim Watt. Lightweight Buchanan is still regarded by many as Britain's most adept post-war boxer, having fought powerhouses of the division in the early 1970s in the United States and in Puerto Rico – contests against the likes of Roberto Duran, Carlos Ortiz, Ruben Navarro and Ismael Laguna. But if Hearn's promotional nous can be employed to full effect, Burns could capitalize with major names in the 140-pound division at present.

The night after Burns' victory, Bellew was crowned WBC cruiserweight champion in Liverpool by finishing Ilunga Makabu – one of the most dangerous punchers at 200 pounds, with 18 knockouts in 19 victories – in an intoxicating third-round assault after being down on the canvas himself in the first three minutes.

Four weeks earlier, Bellew even revealed he had a broken rib on his right side and had to have hyperbaric treatment to make him fit enough to fight. He had also damaged a hand in camp. There was risk in the strategy as Bellew went for broke to sensationally knock out the Congolese fighter 1 minute, 20 seconds into Round 3, pummeling the WBC's No. 1 contender to become a world titleholder in the open air at the soccer club, Everton, he has supported since he was a boy. It was the first boxing event to be held there and the first open-air stadium fight in Liverpool in 67 years. Bellew, who played "Pretty" Ricky Conlan in the movie "Creed," created his own Hollywood ending in his third attempt at winning a world title.

NICOLA ADAMS

Finally ... huge dedication has brought British flyweight amateur Nicola Adams her first world championship title in her fourth attempt. That gives Adams, 33, the "grand slam" as the only female boxer in the history of the sport to have won every major title as reigning Olympic and Commonwealth Games champion as well as No. 1 in last summer's inaugural European Games in Baku. Adams also won the European Championship title in 2011. Previously, she had won silvers at the world championship finals in 2008, 2010 and 2012. For almost 10 years of her career, Adams was without the exceptional funding and support now in place for Great Britain's elite women boxers. Nine support staff traveled to Kazakhstan for a team of five women. Cheers.

TOP 10

1. TYSON FURY
2. KELL BROOK
3. AMIR KHAN
4. LEE SELBY
5. CARL FRAMPTON
6. JAMES DEGALE
7. JAMIE MCDONNELL
8. SCOTT QUIGG
9. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
10. TONY BELLEW

11-15: Liam Smith, Callum Smith, Terry Flanagan, Anthony Crolla, Ricky Burns

Through fights of June 5, 2016

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The Telegraph, London.

Doug Fischer would favor the second incarnation of Muhammad Ali to beat the first.

EXCERPTS FROM THE **RINGTV.COM** EDITOR'S POPULAR COLUMN

Since 2001, RingTV.com Editor Doug Fischer has held an ongoing dialog – which occasionally becomes heated debate – with boxing fans from around the world in "Dougie's Mailbag."

The following excerpts are from the June 3 and 6 editions of the Monday and Friday mailbags.

KEN KOZBERG, from Oakham, Massachusetts, wrote in to share his thoughts and feelings on Muhammad Ali's passing. As one of the "older readers" of the mailbag, Ken recalled Ali's Olympic gold medal victory and watching many of his professional highlights on ABC's "Wide World of Sports." Ken, who credits Ali as the boxer who turned him on to a lifelong love of boxing, asked whether Fischer had ever crossed paths with The Greatest?

DOUGIE'S reply: I crossed paths with Ali once. It was 20 years ago, the day after the premiere of the "When We Were Kings" documentary at Magic Johnson's Baldwin Hills-Crenshaw Plaza movie theater in the heart of South Central L.A. Ali made an unannounced appearance so he wasn't surrounded by a huge entourage. I've never been the type to give a damn about celebrities but I don't mind telling you that I lost my mind for a few delightful minutes when I saw him. I ran over and jumped around him like a kid, occasionally reaching out to touch his arm and shoulder (and probably freaking out poor Lonnie, his wife, who was by his side). Ali didn't seem to mind. He was there to be around people and everybody who was there wanted to be around him. And Ali, ever the showman, gave us a show. He was still able-bodied enough to do an old-man version of his shuffle with a little shadow boxing mixed in. The muscle-memory moves caused even the younger folks who weren't around to witness his heavyweight reigns cheer and chant "ALI! ALI! ALI!"

BP, from Toronto, Canada, asked Fischer for his favorite memory of Ali and also proposed this strange mythical matchup: 1960s Ali vs. early-to-mid '70s Ali.

DOUGIE'S reply: Although the Ali of the '60s was faster, had quicker reflexes and was more mobile, I'm going to go with the early-to-mid '70s Ali by decision because the veteran version was more battle-tested – mainly from his epic first encounter with Joe Frazier – and had the experience of losing and coming back. Plus, he was heavier, still very athletic and perhaps a harder puncher.

My favorite memory of Ali? I don't really have a favorite. Much of what I know about him was learned shortly after his retirement and during the early years of my hardcore fandom (the late 1980s) when I would buy every Ali-related magazine, book or VHS tape that I could get my hands on.

However, I am old enough (born in 1970) to recall the tail end of his second title reign. I had heard the name "Muhammad Ali" from adults and teenagers (that included my father, teachers and babysitters) before I'd ever seen the man. But my earliest memory of actually seeing Ali on TV came during the build-up to his title defense against Earnie Shavers in September 1977. Shavers was based in Ohio, where I lived at the time (my parents were grad students at Ohio State University in Columbus) so there was a local buzz about this particular fight. My dad, who thought Ali was on his way out based on the Ken Norton rubber match the previous year, and his friends talked about the fight and what might happen while I was transfixed by Ali's larger-than-life persona on TV. I'd never seen a respected pro athlete crack jokes the way Ali did with Shavers. I vividly remember him explaining his nickname for the fearsome puncher, "the acorn," by holding up a photo of Shaver's head, covering the face with a piece of paper, leaving only the bald dome exposed, and I wanted to see more.

My dad figured Ali had slowed down enough for Shavers to clip him and some of his friends who seemed to know a lot about sports agreed with him, which bothered me even though I had only recently become aware of the heavyweight champ. But I didn't let the adults know that their doubts made me nervous. I bet my dad that week's allowance that Ali would win and he took that action; he was impressed with my confidence. We watched the fight together but I fell asleep before the end of the bout. (Hey, I was 7 years old. I was into Ali, not boxing. I didn't really get into the sport until Sugar Ray Leonard emerged as a top contender a few years later.) Anyway, Dad let me know that Ali won the next morning and I doubled my allowance.

The next year, DC Comics came out with a special giant-sized collector's book featuring Ali vs. Superman in brilliant Neal Adams art and that was the clincher: I became as hooked on the heavyweight champ as I was on my favorite superhero, movie star or rock group at the time.

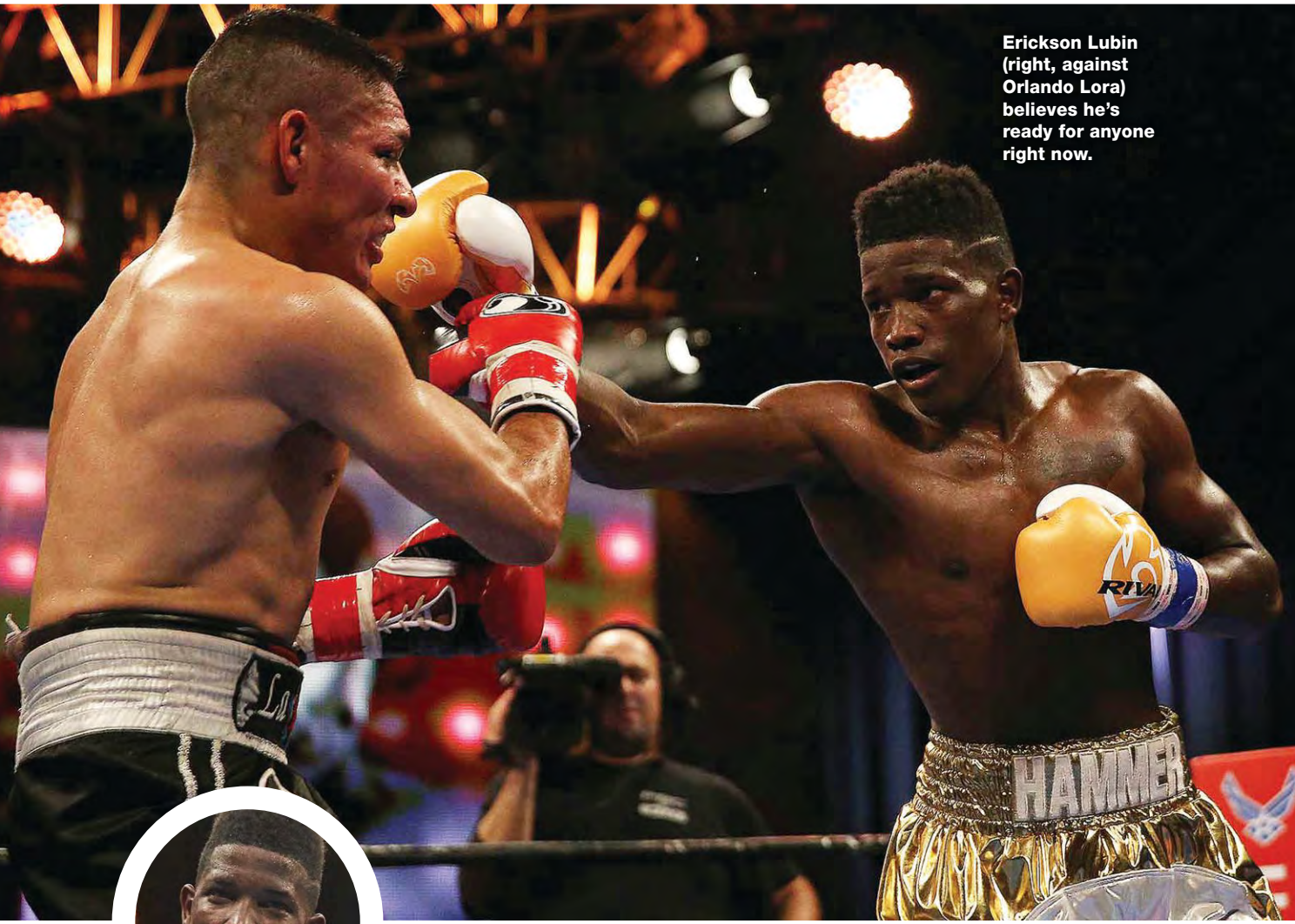
CARLOS, from Hermosillo, Mexico, had the ultimate praise for the Francisco Vargas-Orlando Salido fight. Carlos, who watched it at a restaurant, said the 130-pound battle was "so damn good" it was "difficult to watch. The pace was so exhilarating you could hardly grab your glass to drink or your fork to eat. I am not exaggerating." Carlos said he was relieved to hear the judges' decision. "No one deserves to lose. Actually, I felt kind of good when the bout ended. It did not feel right to me to see how these guys probably shortened their lives so we could be amused for 36 minutes." He added that Vargas and Salido "made us Mexicans feel even prouder for our already rich boxing heritage."

DOUGIE'S reply: I agree that Vargas-Salido lived up to Mexico's rich boxing tradition. Their fight deserves to be mentioned among the other modern classic, all-Mexican ring wars I've covered over the past 16 years, including Barrera-Morales I and II, and Vazquez-Marquez I, II and III.

But I expected a ring war. I did not buy into the cynical fan narrative of Salido being a "spent bullet." He looked too strong and capable – and punishing – en route to his previous "draw" with Rocky Martinez last September for me to count him out against Vargas.

I agree that both deserved to have their hands raised after the super-human effort they gave. I also scored the fight a draw.

I don't agree with your "guilt" about watching Vargas and Salido go at it like mortal enemies for 36 minutes. Don't get squeamish on me, hombre. That's what warriors do. They fight. They spill blood and they give everything they've got. That's why we show up when they fight. That's why we cheer as loudly as we do. That's why we honor them.



Erickson Lubin (right, against Orlando Lora) believes he's ready for anyone right now.

NO REGRETS

ERICKSON LUBIN CHOSE THE PRO RANKS OVER THE OLYMPICS AND HASN'T LOOKED BACK

Erickson Lubin has quickly earned a reputation as a blue-chip prospect. The rising junior middleweight appreciates the praise because the attention that has followed him hasn't always been nurturing.

When Lubin announced on Twitter he was signing with Mike Tyson's now-defunct Iron Mike Productions in 2013, it caused the then-president of USA Boxing to lose his mind.

Lubin was regarded as perhaps America's top amateur at the time. And Dr. Charles Butler, who resigned from USA Boxing in April 2014, was so upset he penned an open letter to Tyson, asking him to stop poaching boxers from the amateur system.

"You are offering these athletes pennies on the dollar of what they could be worth with an Olympic medal, or even potentially just being an Olympian," Butler wrote to the former heavyweight champion. "You are also undermining the next United States Olympic Boxing Team in the process."

Lubin was just 18 when he signed with Tyson. Butler wrote in the letter that he felt Lubin was too young for the strenuous world of professional boxing. Now a more hardened 20, Lubin (14-0, 10 knockouts) says he has no regrets – even as the Olympics are rapidly approaching.

"The pros are very different than the amateurs," said Erickson, who is advised by Al Haymon. "You have

to be more about your business. I'm always in the gym. It was always a dream to be a pro and I just have to keep on doing what I'm doing as I chase a world title. I'm eventually going to be champion. It wasn't a hard decision (to leave the amateurs) but it was something to think about to jump into the pro game. Now I'm learning different things. I know I still have plenty to learn and I have a lot of experience behind me to help me."

Lubin is close with southpaw bantamweight Shakur Stevenson, who is perhaps America's best hope to win gold this summer in Rio de Janeiro. The two talk from time to time, but the conversation rarely touches on what could have been if Lubin had remained an amateur.

"We're really good friends," Lubin said. "Whenever we're (close) we always link up and talk. I'm proud of him because he's doing really well."

While Lubin is experiencing success, it hasn't always been stress-free. In 2014, his co-manager Garry Jonas split from Tyson and brought Lubin to Haymon, who could deliver television dates. "He really hasn't missed a beat," Jonas said of the six fights under Haymon. "Everything has been pretty seamless."

Lubin, who was 143-7 as an amateur, has also gotten an education in the professional ring. He was knocked down in the first round of his eighth fight against veteran Norberto Gonzalez on Nov. 14, 2014.

"Me and Henry looked at each other in a panic," said Jonas, who co-manages Lubin with Henry Rivalta. "But Erickson got up, dusted himself off and proceeded to dominate the fight and win (a decision) easy. That was a good learning experience for Erickson."

Lubin was awakened to the realities of professional boxing that day, unlike in the amateurs when he could drop his hands and relax. He learned he had to keep his hands up at all times.

THE ESSENTIALS
ERICKSON LUBIN

Age: 20

Weight class: Junior middleweight

Height: 5 feet 11 inches

Stance: Southpaw

Hometown: Orlando, Florida

Record: 14-0 (10 KOs)

Biggest strengths: Lubin has power in both hands – you don't get the nickname "The Hammer" for lacking strength. He also has fast hands and mixes up his punches well.

Biggest question marks: Lubin has the confidence and skills to challenge the top fighters in his division but his handlers would like to see his body fill out more before he makes that jump. So, physically, he's somewhat of an unfinished product and has a little growing to do.

"My previous fights I would just go in there and bang everybody out in like the first two rounds," he said. "I kind of dropped my hands real quick (against Gonzalez) and he saw the opening and landed a shot I didn't really see. He put me down. It was a flash knockdown but I got back up and dominated the fight.

"I'm just learning, in and outside the ring. I'm always learning different things."

At the same time, Lubin says he's prepared to face the junior middleweight titleholders, including the Charlo brothers, Jermall and Jermell.

"I'm ready now," he said. "If you said I'm facing the Charlos in my next fight, I'd say I'm ready now." RING

MALIK HAWKINS
WELTERWEIGHT

Hawkins (8-0, 7 KOs) has fast hands and fast feet and has shown resilience in his young career that could portend better things to come. In his last fight, a fifth-round knockout of veteran Richard Hall on May 27, Hawkins, who fights for promoter Greg Cohen, had to cope with an awkward style and a fusillade of punches in the third round before regaining control of the fight and stopping his third consecutive opponent.

JASON QUIGLEY
MIDDLEWEIGHT

Quigley (11-0, 9 KOs) took a giant step forward in his career with an impressive victory, shutting out the more experienced James De La Rosa on May 7 on the undercard of Canelo Alvarez-Amir Khan in Las Vegas. The 25-year-old from Ireland, now living and training in the U.S. for Golden Boy, boxed smart and utilized his jab and whipping combinations to make a statement in his biggest fight to date.

CONOR BENN
WELTERWEIGHT

The son of former two-division titleholder Nigel Benn has a lot to live up to. But so far Benn, who is signed to Eddie Hearn, has shown he's a chip off the old block with two wins to open his career, one a first-round demolition in his pro debut and the other a hard-fought decision victory against Luke Keleher in which he had to dig deep to raise his record to 2-0.

The experience of reigning Olympic champion Claressa Shields (left) will benefit teammate Mikaela Mayer.

DYNAMIC DUO

TEAM USA'S **CLARESSA SHIELDS** AND **MIKAELA MAYER** ENTER THE OLYMPICS WITH A STRONG BOND

Mikaela Mayer laughs when she recalls her first meeting with the woman who would become her teammate in the 2016 Olympics, Claressa Shields.

Before the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials, Flint, Michigan's Shields was the boxing equivalent of an urban myth. Many had heard of the teenager's exploits in the ring but few had seen them with their own eyes.

"I heard that you're really good and you're supposed to win this thing," Mayer said to Shields.

True on both counts. The 17-year-old Shields won a spot on the 2012 Olympic team, won the gold medal in London and, yeah, she's really good.

"Ever since then, she's been living up to that rumor," Mayer said.

Mayer, who lives in Los Angeles, narrowly missed out on her shot at Olympic glory in 2012, losing 22-19 to Queen Underwood in the Trials. She defeated Jajaira Gonzalez this past November but she still had

to qualify for the Rio de Janeiro Games. And she did so in the Americas qualifier in Buenos Aires, where she came out on top.

No one was happier than Shields.

"She had to get the number one spot in Argentina," said Shields, who also clinched a spot in her second Olympics in the qualifier. "When she stepped up (against) those girls, I was so proud of her. I knew it was something she had in her and I had always seen it. I was just glad that she took it out."

Now both are heading to the Olympics, from such different backgrounds but so alike that they describe their relationship as sister-like.

Mayer is the former model from Southern California, Shields the phenom from Flint who could be the most dominating fighter in the world at the moment – male or female, professional or amateur. But together, they're Team USA, the only two women on the squad.

And these slugging sisters wouldn't have it any other way.

"In the last year and a half we got really close," said Mayer, 26. "She's an amazing person to have on the team because not only is she super talented and inspiring to be around but she makes you hungry to get that win and she's a really good team player. She makes me feel even more confident about going to these games."

Shields agrees, noting that it may be their different personalities that make everything work between them.

"We train in a quiet gym because Coach won't let us listen to music," she said, "so when we get into the ring and it's time for us to show our skills, I'm excited and I'm ready to go. But she (Mayer) is so calm. I tell her, 'You need to get pumped up, it's time to fight.' (Laughs.)

"We have that kind of relationship where I can read her, so I can give her advice and I can help her."

The Olympic experience of the now-21-year-old Shields will be invaluable for Mayer once the Games begin, especially since there are different expectations for the two. Shields is the gold standard (pardon the pun), not just in the 165-pound middleweight division but in all of women's boxing. In short, she's expected to run through the field, especially after picking up a second world championship in May. Her current winning streak: 48 fights. She said the run to a second Olympic gold medal won't be easy but then she laughs and corrects herself.

"It is going to be easy because people don't know how hard I'm gonna train for this and how I'm gonna dominate," she said. "Going into these games, I'm really well respected and I'm expected to win another gold medal and I'm so focused and so ready to go and do it. The only thing I'm waiting on is time."

As for Mayer, who competes in the 132-pound lightweight division, she is in perhaps the most competitive of the three women's weight classes in Rio. Among her rivals will be Irish standout Katie Taylor, who was upset by France's Estelle Mossely in the semifinals of the World Championships. If Taylor's not safe, then no one is, which is a good sign for Mayer, who hopes to upset the field.

"There are 12 girls and I know all of them," she said. "I've seen them all fight and it's a very competitive weight class. All of these girls are very, very talented, including myself, and it's a pretty nice, even playing field. We've all been around for a very long time and every single one of them is going to be a challenge. But I'm preparing for that."

Mayer hopes the hard work will lead to two gold medals, one for her and the other for someone who just happens to be one of her closest friends.

"I thought about all of that," Mayer said. "It's something I've always dreamed of doing but I actually get to do it now." RING

1. **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 28-0 (7 KOs)
Welterweight

2. **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 36-1 (16 KOs)
Lightweight

3. **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 36-10-1 (19 KOs)
Featherweight

4. **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 26-4-3 (4 KOs)
Flyweight

5. **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 37-13-5 (9 KOs)
Lightweight

6. **ERICA ANABELLA FARIAS**
Argentina • 22-1 (10 KOs)
Junior welterweight

7. **BETH ZAMORA SILVA**
Mexico • 25-5 (10 KOs)
Junior flyweight

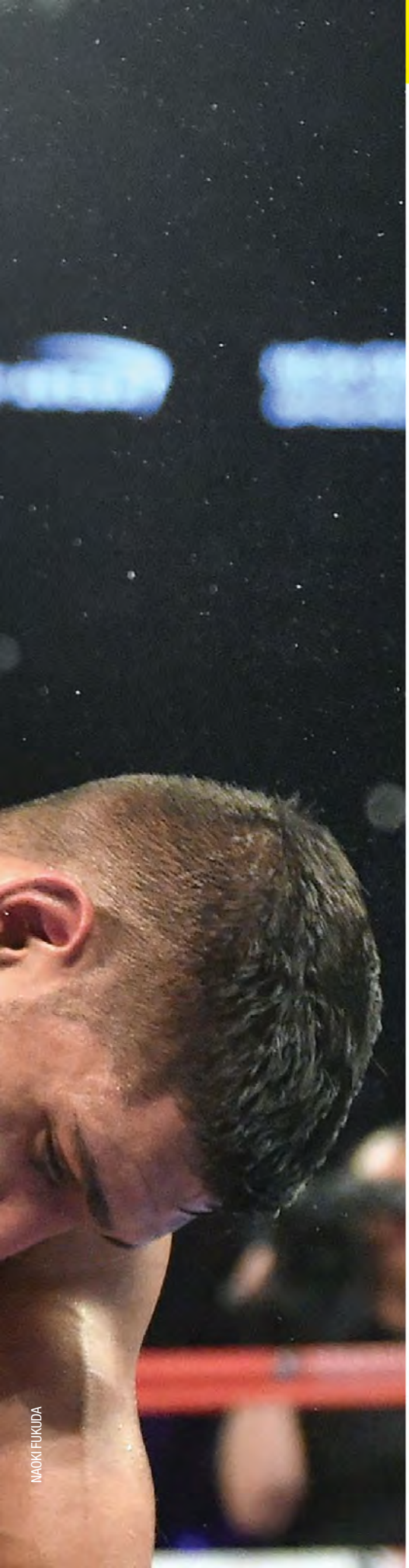
8. **ALICIA ASHLEY**
U.S. • 23-10-1 (4 KOs)
Junior featherweight

9. **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 46-1-2 (27 KOs)
Junior bantamweight

10. **AMANDA SERRANO**
U.S. • 28-1-1 (21 KOs)
Featherweight

Through fights of June 5, 2016

Canelo Alvarez ended an interesting fight with a single punch to the chin of Amir Khan on May 7.



NAOKI FUKUDA

RINGSIDE REPORTS

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM

CANELO ALVAREZ KO 6 AMIR KHAN

Date: May 7
Site: T-Mobile Arena, Las Vegas
Division: Middleweight
Weights: Alvarez 155 pounds, Khan 155
RING ratings (before fight): Alvarez C, Khan No. 3 welterweight
Network: HBO Pay-Per-View, BoxNation

It was an invitation that hinted at what fans really want to see.

Canelo Alvarez looked at Gennady Golovkin and, with hands that had just stopped Amir Khan in a frightening finish, he waved at GGG, summoning him into the ring. It was a gesture that seemed to say Canelo wanted GGG to step into that place where they would soon settle things.

A couple of weeks later, however, it would look like a fleeting moment.

With an approaching deadline for Canelo to reach a deal to defend his WBC middleweight title in a mandatory against GGG, he said goodbye to the belt, saying in a May 18 statement that he didn't want to be forced into an agreement by "artificial deadlines."

There were financial reasons to relinquish a 160-pound title he won and retained at a 155-pound catchweight. Without an agreement, the fight would have gone to the highest bidder with 55 percent of the purse going to Canelo and 45 percent to GGG. Thanks, but no thanks. All of the leverage is on Canelo's side of the table.

Pay-per-view numbers for his demolition of Khan were reported to be 600,000, less than his victory for the title in a unanimous decision over Miguel Cotto but four times bigger than the reported 150,000 for GGG's only pay-per-view appearance in a victory over David Lemieux.

"I have four aces, they probably have a pair of twos," Canelo promoter Oscar De La Hoya said when asked about leverage after the KO of Khan.

Translation: Expect Canelo to demand at least a 60-40 split.

Expectation at the time this issue went to press: Wait until next year.

But don't blame Canelo (47-1-1, 33 KOs). He often sounds as impatient as any fan demanding the GGG fight. In the immediate aftermath of throwing a right hand that sent Khan (31-4,19 KOs) bouncing off the canvas like a flat board thrown out of a second-story window, he was angry at suggestions he was ducking the feared GGG.

"Like we say in Mexico: 'We don't f--- around,'" he said. "I don't fear anyone. We don't come to play in this sport. I fear no one in this sport.

"Right now, right now, I'll put on the gloves."

Canelo's tone was accented by an evident immediacy. But his corner appears to be working on a different clock. A couple of days before the opening bell, it seemed clear that Canelo's next opponent would not be GGG.

Alvarez was concerned about Khan.

In a media roundtable, Canelo trainer Eddy Reynoso said the popular Mexican would not fight a true middleweight in his first bout after Khan. "No, not at all," Reynoso said through an interpreter.

When asked when Canelo would face a fighter with a proven record at 160, Reynoso said: "Maybe in two or three fights. But now, not at all."

The wait goes on. »

WORLDWIDE RESULTS— Go to: bit.ly/worldwide-results or scan the QR code to see weekly fight results at RingTV.com.

JEZREEL CORRALES KO 2 NO. 1 TAKASHI UCHIYAMA

April 27, Tokyo (TV Tokyo)

A contender for the 2016 Upset of the Year is already on the ballot, put there by Jezreel Corrales, an unknown Panamanian who introduced himself to the top of the junior lightweight division.

Corrales did so by traveling a long way and against long odds. Takashi Uchiyama was Japan's most respected champion. He was the WBA's 130-pound titleholder for more than six years.

Within two rounds, Uchiyama's reign was over.

The left-handed Corrales (20-1, 8 KOs) dropped the 36-year-old Uchiyama (24-1-1, 20 KOs) three times in the second, prompting referee Robert Hoyle to end it at 2:59 of the round without a count.

"I don't remember how many punches I took," said Uchiyama, who was overwhelmed by Corrales' hand speed. "I couldn't see them."

Nobody saw that coming.

NO. 1 JAMES DEGALE UD 12 ROGELIA MEDINA

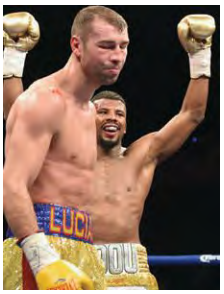
April 30, Washington, D.C. (Showtime)

It was a fight that got headlines for what belongs in a spit bucket. Yup, it was forgettable.

For James DeGale, that's good news. He can forget about a 115-113, 116-112, 117-111 decision over Rogelia Medina in a bout without drama yet meaningful because it set up a date with Badou Jack for two pieces of the super middleweight title, possibly in London.

"I'm a bit disappointed," DeGale (23-1, 14 KOs) said after retaining his IBF belt. "I should be taking out people like Medina. But the main thing is I'm still the champ."

Medina (36-7, 30 KOs) had toughness but little else. His punches missed. At the end of the 11th, he spit. He said he was frustrated at DeGale's tactics. Like most of his punches, it didn't land where it should have – at the bottom of that bucket.



NO. 2 BADOU JACK D 12 LUCIAN BUTE

April 30, Washington, D.C. (Showtime)

First, there was controversy over the scoring for Badou Jack-Lucian Bute. Then there was news that Bute flunked the first step, the so-called "A" sample, in the post-fight drug test.

It was about the only thing positive in a majority draw between the two super middleweights.

The Washington, D.C., commission notified the WBC of Bute's positive test for ostarine, a substance said to enhance endurance, nearly four weeks after Jack kept his WBC title.

In a statement, Bute (32-3-1, 25 KOs) denied taking PEDs and said he would be cleared when the "B" sample was tested, which hadn't happened by press time.

News of the test angered Jack (20-1-2, 12 KOs) even more than the scorecards – 114-114 on two and 117-111 in his favor on the third.

"He still couldn't beat me, even using something," he said.

NO. 4 ANTHONY CROLLA KO 7 ISMAEL BARROSO

May 7, Manchester, England (SkySports)

Anthony Crolla keeps hearing about everything he can't do. When he suffered serious injuries in trying to apprehend a couple of burglars in December 2014, he was told he was probably finished as a boxer. He was told he was lucky to be alive.

But don't tell him he's lucky to be a lightweight champ.

Since his recovery from a fractured skull when he was hit by a chunk of concrete, Crolla (31-4-3, 13 KOs) has been deadly effective, winning a rematch of a draw with Darleys Perez for the WBA belt and then successfully defending it with a body shot that knocked out Ismael Barroso at 1:31 of the seventh round.

"It got my back up that people said I would avoid Barroso," said Crolla, who trailed 59-55, 58-56, 59-55 on the scorecards when he finished Barroso (19-1-2, 18 KOs). "I'm improving all the time."

NO. 1 NAOYA INOUE UD 12 DAVID CARMONA

May 8, Tokyo (Fuji TV)

Naoya Inoue, more prodigy than prospect, is not allowed to struggle. Mistakes are expected from prospects. But perfection is the expectation for prodigies and Inoue was less than that against David Carmona.

Inoue (10-0, 8 KOs) floored Carmona in the 12th round to cap a one-sided decision – 118-109 on two cards and 116-111 on the third – in retaining his WBO 115-pound belt for the second time in only his 10th pro bout.

Carmona (20-3-5, 8 KOs), of Mexico City, never had a chance. But he landed big shots, leaving Inoue bruised and looking vulnerable in a way he never has.

"I betrayed expectations spectacularly," Inoue told The Japan Times with spectacular humility. "I am sorry for that."

It was an apology, perhaps, for what might have happened had Inoue fought Roman Gonzalez, the pound-for-pound and flyweight king who might be ready to jump from 112 to 115.

NO. 2 DENIS LEBEDEV TKO 2 NO. 10 VICTOR RAMIREZ

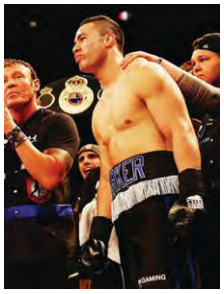
May 21, Moscow

The show had to go on, or at least Russian promoters thought so after Alexander Povetkin's positive drug test forced his heavyweight title fight with Deontay Wilder off the card. Showtime stayed home. Victor Ramirez should have.

Russian Denis Lebedev (29-2, 22 KOs) prevailed in a cruiserweight unification bout with a swift stoppage of Ramirez (22-3-1, 17 KOs), an Argentine who went down like a novice on skates at Khodynka Ice Palace.

Lebedev, who might be headed for a bout with Beibut Shumenov or Tony Bellew, knocked down the overmatched Ramirez with left uppercuts midway through the second and then rocked him with a succession of blows, forcing Steve Smoger to stop it at 1:57 of the round.

There were complaints about a late stoppage but criticism was muted by controversy about whether Wilder-Povetkin would ever happen. Lots of doubt there but there was no doubt about Lebedev-Ramirez.



NO. 9 JOSEPH PARKER UD 12 CARLOS TAKAM

May 21, New Zealand (SkySports)

It's still hard to know who the face of the heavyweight division will be. Deontay Wilder? Tyson Fury? Wladimir Klitschko if he beats Fury in a rematch?

Or Anthony Joshua?

Joshua, the young lion among the contenders, is generating the biggest buzz, especially in the U.K. A sure sign of his emerging popularity was the interest in potential foes leading up to his June 25 bout against Dominic Breazeale in London.

That's what brought SkySports to New Zealand for a telecast of unknown Joseph Parker's upset of Carlos Takam.

Parker (19-0, 16 KOs) did what he had to, meaning he was the busier fighter in a 116-112, 115-113, 116-112 decision over Takam (33-3-1, 25 KOs), best known for a 2014 draw with Mike Perez.

It was forgettable yet significant because it put Parker on Joshua's radar as the mandatory challenger for his IBF title.

NO. 10 JOHNRIEL CASIMERO KO 4 NO. 2 AMNAT RUENROENG

May 25, Beijing (CCTV5)

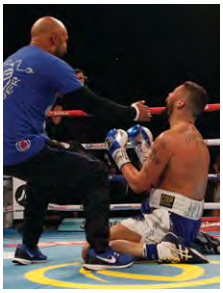
Amnat Ruenroeng might have been the best flyweight not named Roman Gonzalez. At 36, however, he was vulnerable and Filipino Johnriel Casimero knew it.

Casimero traveled to China, where Ruenroeng scored a 2015 upset of Zou Shiming, and made Ruenroeng look like flyweight history with a fourth-round stoppage.

In a rematch of a controversial decision last year, Casimero (22-3, 14 KOs) handed Ruenroeng (17-1, 5 KOs) his first loss, knocking down the Thai fighter with a left and finishing him with a body shot at 2:10 of the round

In a weigh-in at the Great Wall of China, Ruenroeng was 5.75 pounds and Casimero 1.25 heavier than the 112-pound limit. IBF supervisors blamed unstable conditions at the Wall and then said both fighters made weight at the hotel, headquarters for the organization's convention.

It was confusing. The result wasn't.



NO. 9 TONY BELLEW KO 3 NO. 5 ILUNGA MAKABU

May 29, Liverpool, England (SkySports)

Reality imitated fantasy, film became fact for Tony Bellew, who had a role in the Rocky movie "Creed" and won a cruiserweight title at the soccer stadium where scenes from the movie were filmed.

"Pretty" Ricky Conlan on the big screen, Bellew (27-2-1, 17 KOs) was dramatic on canvas, getting up from a first-round knockdown for a third-round stoppage of Ilunga Makabu (19-2, 18 KOs).

"It's still strange thinking about it now," Bellew, son of a former bank-robber and grandson of a cop told writer Gareth A Davies before opening bell.

Think about it in the aftermath and it's storybook.

Floored by a left in the first, Bellew – the U.K.'s 12th fighter to currently own a major title – landed a succession of hooks and then a short left to finish Makabu, who was unconscious before he hit the canvas at 1:20 of the third.

NO. 1 FRANCISCO VARGAS D 12 NO. 4 ORLANDO SALIDO

June 4, Carson, Calif. (HBO)

There was no winner, other than the fight itself, which might have won enough votes for Fight of the Year if the election had been held in June.

Francisco Vargas and Orlando Salido battled to a majority draw that saw the two junior lightweights combine for more than 2,000 punches. According to CompuBox, 714 punches landed. Of those, 615 were power punches.

Yet there were no knockdowns. There was only punishment and pride on the night after Muhammad Ali died.

"I feel really good about this," Vargas (23-0-2, 17 KOs) said after two judges scored it 114-114 and the third favored him 115-113.

Salido (43-13-4, 30 KOs) wasn't as bruised as Vargas, who was cut above both eyes. He also wasn't as happy.

"I think I won," he said.

A rematch seems inevitable but both had other ideas.

Said Vargas: "I need to relax a bit."

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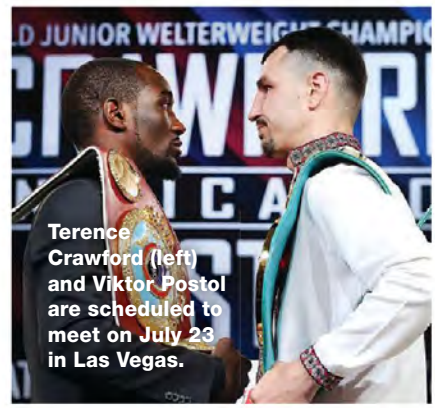
COMING UP

Predictions are made by RING staff members Mitch Abramson, Doug Fischer, Brian Harty and Michael Rosenthal



Terence Crawford (left) and Viktor Postol are scheduled to meet on July 23 in Las Vegas.

JULY

VIKTOR POSTOL VS. TERENCE CRAWFORD

Date: July 23
Location: MGM Grand, Las Vegas
Division: Junior welterweights (for the vacant RING, Postol's WBC and Crawford's WBO titles)
RING Ratings: Postol No. 1; Crawford No. 2
TV: HBO Pay-Per-View
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★★★★★
Also fighting: Gilberto Ramirez (No. 3) vs. Dominik Britsch, super middleweights (for Ramirez's WBO title); Oscar Valdez (No. 9) vs. Matias Rueda, featherweights.
Significance: This is a rare matchup of two undefeated fighters who are the best in their division. Postol (28-0, 12 KOs) is coming off a sensational KO of Lucas Matthysse, which lifted the Ukrainian to the top of the RING Ratings. Crawford (28-0, 20 KOs) is on an impressive run of significant victories, capped by a knockout of Hank Lundy in February.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Crawford UD; Fischer – Crawford KO 10; Harty – Crawford KO 7; Abramson – Postol SD

LEO SANTA CRUZ VS. CARL FRAMPTON

Date: July 30
Location: Barclays Center, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Division: Featherweights (for Santa Cruz's WBA title)
RING Ratings: Santa Cruz No. 3; Frampton No. 2 junior featherweight
TV: Showtime
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★★★★★
Also fighting: Daniel Jacobs (No. 2) vs. TBA, middleweights; Amanda Serrano (No. 10 P4P) vs. Dahiana Santana, featherweights (for Serrano's WBO title).
Significance: This is another matchup of young fighters at the top of their games. Santa Cruz (32-0-1, 18 KOs) is making the second defense of the title he won by outpointing Abner Mares last year. Frampton (22-0, 14 KOs) unified two 122-pound titles by squeaking past Scott Quigg in February. Frampton will be fighting for the first time as a full-fledged 126-pounder.
Prediction: Rosenthal – Santa Cruz UD; Fischer – Frampton SD; Harty – Santa Cruz UD; Abramson – Santa Cruz UD

JULY 11 – Sergey Kovalev (No. 1) vs. Isaac Chilemba (No. 7), light heavyweights (for Kovalev's IBF, WBA and WBO titles), Ekaterinburg, Russia (HBO).
JULY 16 – Guillermo Rigondeaux (No. 1, No. 5 P4P) vs. James Dickens, junior featherweights (for Rigondeaux's WBA title), Cardiff, Wales.
JULY 16 – Deontay Wilder (No. 2) vs. Chris Arreola, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Birmingham, Ala. (FOX).
JULY 16 – Arthur Abraham (No. 8) vs. Tim Robin Lihaug, super middleweights, Berlin.
JULY 21 – Joseph Parker (No. 8) vs. Solomon Haumono, heavyweights, Christchurch, New Zealand.
JULY 29 – Adonis Stevenson (No. 2) vs. Thomas Williams Jr., light heavyweights (for Stevenson's WBC title), Quebec, Canada.

AUGUST

AUG. 6 – Juan Diaz vs. Cesar Vazquez, lightweights, Tucson, Ariz. (UniMas)
AUG. 6 – Jose Zepeda vs. Edvaldo Ortega, junior welterweights, Mexico (beIN Sports Espanol)

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 24 – Donnie Nietes (C) vs. Moises Fuentes (No. 10), junior flyweights, Carson, Calif.
SEPT. 24 – Anthony Crolla vs. Jorge Linares, lightweights (for the vacant RING and Crolla's WBA titles), Manchester, England

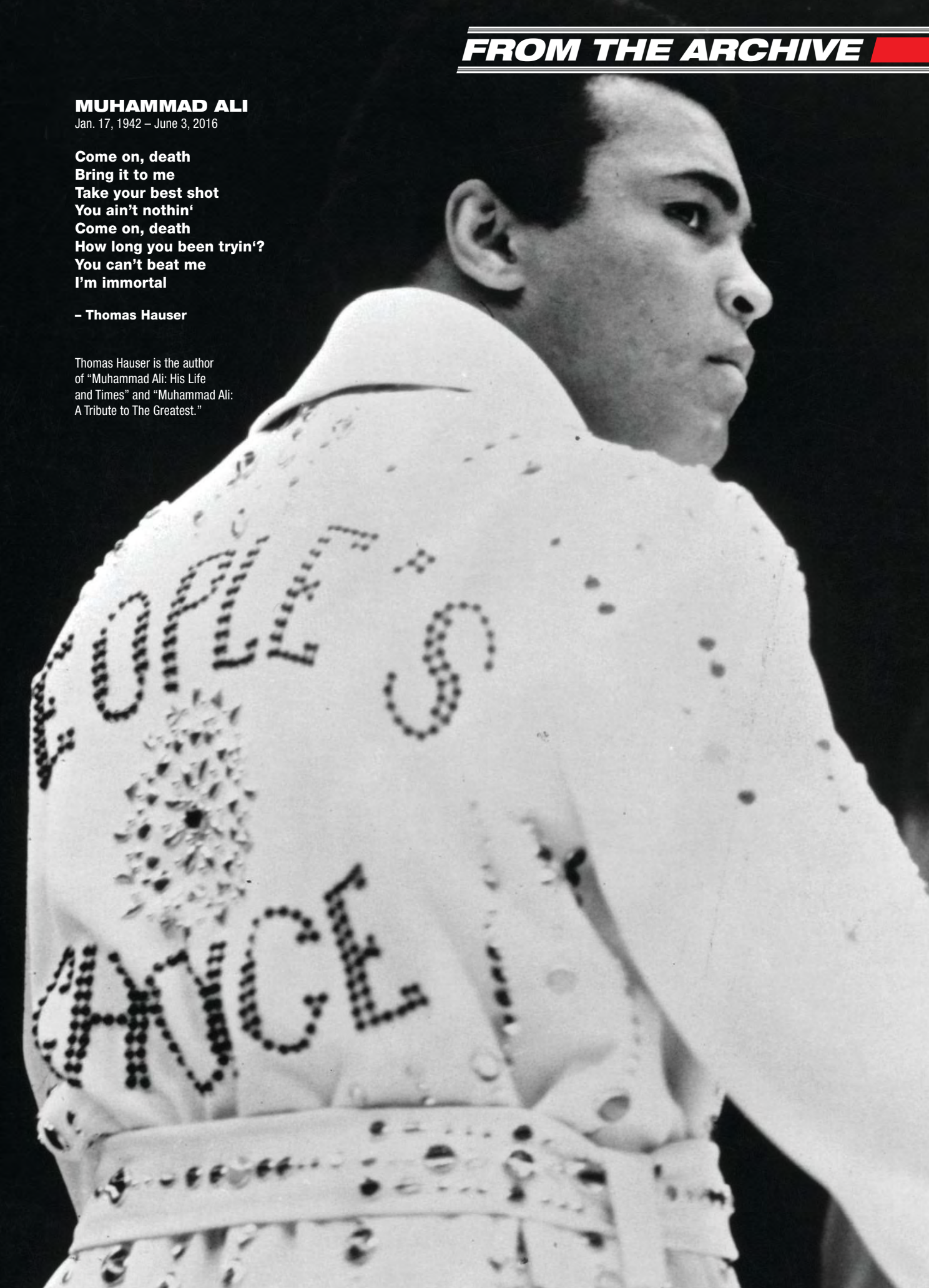
MUHAMMAD ALI

Jan. 17, 1942 – June 3, 2016

Come on, death
Bring it to me
Take your best shot
You ain't nothin'
Come on, death
How long you been tryin'?
You can't beat me
I'm immortal

– Thomas Hauser

Thomas Hauser is the author of "Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times" and "Muhammad Ali: A Tribute to The Greatest."



#ATTHEFIGHTS

By **Lamar Clark**

FOR BOXING AFICIONADOS ONLY

OLD SCHOOL vs. NEW SCHOOL

WHO WINS? ★ VOTE ON INSTAGRAM @RINGTV ★ #ATTHEFIGHTS

1999 **Felix Trinidad**

VS.

2016 **Kell BrooK**

JAN. 10, 1973	BORN	MAY 3, 1986
CUPEY ALTO, PUERTO RICO	BIRTHPLACE	SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND
"TITO"	ALIAS	"SPECIAL K"
ORTHODOX	STANCE	ORTHODOX
42-3 (35 KOs)	CAREER RECORD	36-0 (25 KOs)
78 PERCENT	KO RATE	69 PERCENT
72½ INCHES	REACH	69 INCHES

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Actors Will Smith (top) and Billy Crystal were among many celebrities who attended the memorial for Muhammad Ali on June 10 in Louisville, Kentucky. Crystal's eulogy was touching and humorous.

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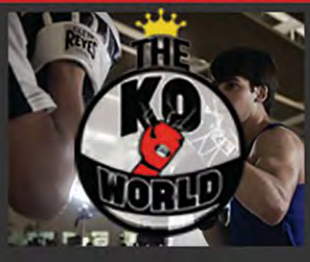

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